



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

Volume 51

(26 April 2010 to 23 May 2010)

Table of Contents

Assembly Members	i
Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly	ii
Ministerial Offices	iii

Assembly Sittings

Monday 26 April 2010

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill: First Stage	1
Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: First Stage	1

Committee Business

Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage	2
Debt Relief Bill: Extension of Committee Stage	2
Special European Union Programmes Body	3

Private Members' Business

Caravans Bill: First Stage	11
Development of a Jobs Strategy	12

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	27
Justice	33

Private Members' Business

Funding for Army Cadets	40
-------------------------------	----

Tuesday 27 April 2010

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Finance) Bill: Second Stage	49
Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage	61

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development	84
---	----

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage (<i>continued</i>)	91
---	----

Private Members' Business

Quangos and Arm's-length Bodies of Government Departments	100
---	-----

Adjournment

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services	110
---	-----

Tuesday 4 May 2010

Private Members' Business

Over 60s Travel Pass	119
Tidy Northern Ireland Day	128

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure	139
Education	145
Employment and Learning	151

Adjournment

Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore	157
---------------------------------------	-----

Monday 10 May 2010

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill: Second Stage	165
Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage	177

Committee Business

Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage	178
Local Government (Finance) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage	178
Eggs and Chicks Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010: Prayer of Annulment	179

Private Members' Business

Credit Unions	179
---------------------	-----

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	187
Enterprise, Trade and Investment	194

Tuesday 11 May 2010

Executive Committee Business

Sunbeds Bill: First Stage	201
---------------------------------	-----

Committee Business

Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage	201
Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report	202

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities	218
---	-----

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment	232
Assembly Commission	238

Private Members' Business

I CAN Centre	241
--------------------	-----

Adjournment

B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road	257
------------------------------------	-----

Monday 17 May 2010

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Whitehouse Primary School263

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: First Stage264

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage264

Forestry Bill: Further Consideration Stage.....271

Private Members' Business

Economic Regeneration271

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel286

Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....291

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals297

Private Members' Business

Economic Regeneration (*continued*)303

Robberies303

Tuesday 18 May 2010

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums317

Convergence Delivery Plan332

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development350

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan (*continued*)358

Adjournment

Castle Tower School, Ballymena358

Written Ministerial Statements

Oideachas

Suíomh Gréasáin Acmhainní Múinteora Sparklebox..... WMS 1

Education

Sparklebox Teacher Resource Website WMS 1

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the Economic Downturn WMS 6

Committee Stages

Committee for Regional Development

Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA 6/09)CS 1

Committee for Social Development

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09)CS 3

Written Answers

Friday 30 April 2010

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 1
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 14
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 25
Department of Education	WA 37
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 64
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 68
Department of the Environment.....	WA 76
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 84
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 87
Department of Justice	WA 111
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 115
Department for Social Development	WA 129
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	WA 136

Friday 7 May 2010

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 137
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 137
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 142
Department of Education	WA 165
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 169
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 172
Department of the Environment.....	WA 173
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 174
Department of Justice	WA 184
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 188

Friday 14 May 2010

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 193
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 196
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 200
Department of Education	WA 202
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 254
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 256
Department of the Environment.....	WA 260
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 267
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 269
Department of Justice	WA 275
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 289
Department for Social Development	WA 293
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	WA 304

Friday 21 May 2010

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 307
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 311
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 311
Department of Education	WA 311
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 318

Department of the Environment.....	WA 318
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 323
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 326
Department of Justice	WA 331
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 336
Department for Social Development	WA 347

Revised Written Answers

Environment.....	RWA 1
Finance and Personnel	RWA 2
Regional Development.....	RWA 2
Education	RWA 3
Environment	RWA 3

Indexes

Members' Index	IDX 1
Strangers' Index.....	IDX 29

Assembly Members

Adams, Gerry (West Belfast)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)
Armstrong, Billy (Mid Ulster)
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Bell, Jonathan (Strangford)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Mrs Mary (Foyle)
Bradley, P J (South Down)
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)
Bresland, Allan (West Tyrone)
Browne, The Lord (East Belfast)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)
Burns, Thomas (South Antrim)
Butler, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Campbell, Gregory (East Londonderry)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Clarke, Willie (South Down)
Cobain, Fred (North Belfast)
Coulter, Rev Dr Robert (North Antrim)
Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)
Cree, Leslie (North Down)
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)
Deeny, Dr Kieran (West Tyrone)
Dodds, Nigel (North Belfast)
Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone)
Donaldson, Jeffrey (Lagan Valley)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Empey, Sir Reg (East Belfast)
Farry, Dr Stephen (North Down)
Ford, David (South Antrim)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Gallagher, Tommy (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Gardiner, Samuel (Upper Bann)
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)
Hay, William (Speaker)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)
Kinahan, Danny (South Antrim)
Leonard, Billy (East Londonderry)
Lo, Ms Anna (South Belfast)
Long, Mrs Naomi (East Belfast)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)
McCallister, John (South Down)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)
McCarthy, Kieran (Strangford)
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)
McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)
McClarty, David (East Londonderry)
McCrea, Basil (Lagan Valley)
McCrea, Ian (Mid Ulster)
McCrea, Dr William (South Antrim)
McDevitt, Conall (South Belfast)
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair (South Belfast)
McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)
McFarland, Alan (North Down)
McGill, Mrs Claire (West Tyrone)
McGimpsey, Michael (South Belfast)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGuinness, Martin (Mid Ulster)
McHugh, Gerry (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McKay, Daithí (North Antrim)
McLaughlin, Mitchel (South Antrim)
McNarry, David (Strangford)
McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)
Maginness, Alban (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (South Belfast)
Maskey, Paul (West Belfast)
Molloy, Francie (Mid Ulster)
Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Neeson, Sean (East Antrim)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Loan, Declan (North Antrim)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
Paisley, Rev Dr Ian (North Antrim)
Paisley Jnr, Ian (North Antrim)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Purvis, Ms Dawn (East Belfast)
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)
Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)
Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Robinson, Ken (East Antrim)
Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)
Ruane, Ms Caitríona (South Down)
Savage, George (Upper Bann)
Shannon, Jim (Strangford)
Simpson, David (Upper Bann)
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Brian (North Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly

Speaker.....	Mr William Hay MLA
Deputy Speakers.....	Mr John Dallat MLA Mr David McClarty MLA Mr Francie Molloy MLA
Clerk to the Assembly/Director-General.....	Mr Trevor Reaney
Director of Clerking and Reporting	Mr John Stewart
Director of Engagement	Dr Gareth McGrath
Director of Facilities/Keeper of the House.....	Mr Stephen Welch
Director of Legal Services	Mr Hugh Widdis
Director of Resources	Mr Richard Stewart
Examiner of Statutory Rules	Mr Gordon Nabney
Clerk Assistants.....	Ms Nuala Dunwoody Mr Damien Martin
Editor of Debates	Mr Simon Burrowes
Clerk to the Assembly Commission.....	Mr Tony Logue

Ministerial Offices

The Executive Committee

First Minister	Mr Peter Robinson
Deputy First Minister	Mr Martin McGuinness
Minister for Employment and Learning	Sir Reg Empey
Minister for Regional Development	Mr Conor Murphy
Minister for Social Development	Ms Margaret Ritchie
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.....	Ms Michelle Gildernew
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.....	Mr Nelson McCausland
Minister of Education.....	Ms Caitríona Ruane
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.....	Mrs Arlene Foster
Minister of the Environment	Mr Edwin Poots
Minister of Finance and Personnel.....	Mr Sammy Wilson
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	Mr Michael McGimpsey
Minister of Justice.....	Mr David Ford

Junior Ministers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Mr Gerry Kelly
	Mr Robin Newton

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 April 2010

The Assembly met at 12 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill: First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots):

I beg to introduce the High Hedges Bill [NIA 15/09], which is a Bill to provide for the control of high hedges.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: First Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to introduce the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/09], which is a Bill to amend the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

After the outburst from the leader of the Conservative Party at the weekend, I was expecting to be called the commissar in charge of financing the workers' collectives or something similar in the soviet republic of Northern Ireland. We may suffer for that prejudice at some stage in the future.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Committee Business

Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 28 June 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 7/09].

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Those familiar with the Bill will be aware that it consists of just three clauses. However, that should in no way undermine the importance or the significance of its potential impact, as it seeks to disqualify elected Members of the Assembly from holding office as councillors. On several occasions at the Bill's Second Stage, Members referred to the need for more detailed scrutiny of the Bill during its Committee Stage, which is exactly what the Environment Committee intends to do during the next few weeks.

This is the fourth Bill that the Committee has addressed during the current session, and the House will be aware that several more Bills are already at or about to come to Committee Stage. In order to give the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill the time it needs and deserves, I ask the House to support an extension to the period in which it remains under my Committee's scrutiny.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 28 June 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Local Government(Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 7/09].

Debt Relief Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 2 July 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Debt Relief Bill [NIA Bill 9/09].

It is unlikely that the Committee will require the entire duration of the extension period requested to consider the Bill. However, given the considerable workload of the Committee, an extension until 2 July has been requested as a precautionary measure.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 2 July 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Debt Relief Bill [NIA Bill 9/09].

Special European Union Programmes Body

Mr Speaker: The motion has been jointly tabled by the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. 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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the long and continuing delays within the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) in processing applications for project funding under the European Union INTERREG IVA programme, especially for those projects relating to enterprise, tourism, energy and telecoms, for which DETI is the accountable Department; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to continue to work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and SEUPB to progress applications without further undue delay to enable good quality projects to be implemented quickly for the benefit of local communities.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. Over recent months, the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment have become increasingly concerned at the delays in processing applications for project funding under the European Union INTERREG IVA programme. I welcome the opportunity to co-sponsor the motion today, particularly as I am also a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee.

It may be beneficial if I begin by outlining the background to the situation under discussion. The INTERREG IVA programme is a European Union-supported structural funds programme which aims to promote greater territorial cohesion between the North of Ireland, the border region of the South and western Scotland. Priority one of the programme aims to diversify and develop the economy of the eligible region by encouraging innovation and competitiveness in enterprise and by supporting business and tourism development. The programme is administered by the Special European Union

Programmes Body (SEUPB), which is a North/South body for which the Department of Finance and Personnel is locally responsible. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is the locally accountable Department for enterprise, tourism, energy and telecoms, which are the themed projects under which the North's portion of funding flows through the Department to the SEUPB. That is why both Committees have tabled the motion today.

Altogether, five local authority groups are involved in the implementation of INTERREG IVA, and €60 million is available for locally based projects, within the main themes, until 2013. The five groups are: the North West Region Cross Border Group; the Irish Central Border Area Network; the Councils of the Metropolitan Area, which includes Belfast City Council and the councils of the surrounding area; the North East Partnership; and the East Border Region Committee.

In 2007, each of the local authority groups submitted a multi-annual plan (MAP) to the SEUPB. Those were strategic documents that outlined high-level development needs from which individual projects would subsequently be funded following more detailed applications. I have since had representation from the local authority groups that highlighted delays in the process of agreeing the multi-annual plans and the issuing of letters of offer. In turn, those delays have caused delays in the approval and implementation of projects on the ground. I know that other Members have been approached about those issues and that several questions have been asked in the Chamber about those concerns.

On Wednesday 6 January 2010, the Committee for Finance and Personnel received briefings from officials from DFP's European division and from the chief executive of the SEUPB. I have also held separate meetings with the SEUPB and the five local authority groups, along with the Deputy Chairperson of the Finance Committee and our counterparts in the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Those meetings have helped to assess progress and to identify continuing areas of concern.

The primary issues for the local authority groups are concerns that the goalposts for the assessment for the multi-annual plans were changed midway through the process, resulting in long delays in receiving approval. Although the

SEUPB contends that the MAPs did not contain sufficient detail for approval, the groups have indicated to me and others that they were not told until a late stage about the requirement to develop their applications further for assessment and appraisal.

The groups are not denying the need for proper procedures to be put in place, but they are concerned that, due to the revision of Treasury green book rule guidance and of the SEUPB's own appraisal process, the economic appraisal process was amended part of the way through the assessment of the MAPs. I echo the groups' concerns on that issue, and I ask why the SEUPB considered it appropriate to review its own process when the green book review was ongoing.

A major concern for us all must be the delay in approving projects on the ground. That could lead to the loss of some of the €60 million of funding that has been allocated to the programme under the EU's N+2 rules. The SEUPB has assured the Committee that there is no danger of that happening, but continuing delays have to cast doubt on that assertion.

In a meeting on 22 February 2010, SEUPB representatives assured me and colleagues on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment that there is regular contact between the SEUPB and the five local authority groups. However, in a meeting with those groups that was held only one month later, we were told that the interactive process on the progress of applications that the SEUPB promised in September 2009 has not been forthcoming. We were also told that there is continuing uncertainty about the economic appraisal process and that the process for approving projects appears to be changing constantly.

The SEUPB has indicated to us that, under the INTERREG IIIa programme, the local authority groups were implementing bodies but that, under INTERREG IVa, they now have responsibility for the design and ongoing delivery of projects on their own. The SEUPB suggested that the groups have difficulty in developing a needs analysis and in bringing forward strategic plans. If the role of the local authority groups has changed between the two programmes, I suggest that the SEUPB should have been involved in preparatory work to build the capability and capacity of those groups in the first instance and, therefore, that of any

work that was done on the development of the MAPs in subsequent projects. Can the Minister tell me what assistance and guidance has been given to the groups to ensure that they have all the correct information that they need to carry out their work? The local authority groups have also told us that they have difficulties in recouping costs from the SEUPB, particularly where projects are based on council-owned premises or where councils provide IT support. Those extra difficulties have also caused us serious concerns.

The groups have said that they are quite capable of delivering and implementing the MAPs. The continuing delays and difficulties put in jeopardy not only the delivery on the ground but the reputation and credibility of the local authority groups. The motion calls for the SEUPB to,

"progress applications without further undue delay to enable good projects to be implemented quickly for the benefit of local communities".

Given the state that the economy is in — we are talking about €60 million — the motion is important and will, I hope, be taken forward. I commend the motion to the House.

12.15 pm

Mr McQuillan: I apologise for being a minute or two late for the start of the debate. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, the wording and thrust of which I refute. Having considered the evidence, I believe that the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have been working together on the issue, as on many others brought before their Departments. I refute the claim that there has been a long and continuing delay in the application process for project funding.

The assessment of individual projects has been ongoing since last year, and the groups in question have been asked for further evidence. Every application for funding must meet certain criteria and be assessed on an equal and fair footing with other applications. Any application for funding, especially where government funds are involved, must be assessed under certain criteria, and, where any further evidence is requested to assist in making a decision, that should be provided. Getting that information can cause delays, which is unfortunate, but an application must meet certain criteria before it can be approved.

To date, the programme has allocated more than €100 million in funding, and no evidence of delays is forthcoming. I, therefore, reject the motion on the grounds that there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that delays are occurring. Any delays that may occur are a matter for the individual groups and funders who may request additional information. It is only fair to say that applications should reflect the high standard and hence promote the aims of the funding in enterprise, tourism, collaboration, energy and telecommunications. All applications should meet the aims of the project, and it is only fair that assessors make sure that the proper information is available when making their assessment.

Mr Cree: I also welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I am disappointed that there is some denial on the issue, because, in my opinion, it is not a matter of criticising DFP but of criticising the Special EU Programmes Body.

I am a member of the COMET board and have had first-hand experience of delays in implementing INTERREG IVa funding. I have been in regular communication with the five local government partnerships, and they have also attended various meetings here at Stormont, the latest of which was held on 22 March 2010. All have expressed their frustration at the lack of progress with the Special EU Programmes Body. Unfortunately, it appears to be a blame game, but it is certainly not the case that the partnerships are solely at fault. For example, multi-annual plans were submitted to the SEUPB in 2007. Letters of offer were not issued until December 2008. In June 2009, the SEUPB informed the local authority groups that there would be a new assessment process: the Treasury green book was being reviewed, and that would need to be taken into account in any assessment of applications, the main feature being the need for groups to submit business cases for each element of the plans.

The SEUPB undertook to issue a template for the required business case by September 2009. At a meeting held on 3 September 2009, the groups were informed by the SEUPB that it had reviewed the entire application process, that individual applications were now required and that the business case template would not be forthcoming. That was a further delay, and the blame for it certainly cannot be left at the door of the groups, yet a briefing to the Committee for Finance and Personnel advised that the

process of application and assessment was taking longer than hoped for.

In June and August 2009, DFP worked with the SEUPB and DETI to clarify what was required by way of assessment. The Committee was also told that all stakeholders had now indicated that they understood the requirements. Three groups had made the most progress — ICBAN, the North East Partnership and COMET — but some of their projects had been turned down. I speak from my experience as a representative of the COMET partnership. External consultants working for the SEUPB had conducted the economic appraisals. One of the projects was for an innovation and incubation unit for Belfast, Sligo and north Down. The consultants' comments appeared confused, and the SEUPB agreed to a meeting with the consultants to clarify the situation. At that meeting, which I attended, it was obvious that the consultants did not fully understand the subject, and, subsequently, new consultants were commissioned to conduct a further appraisal. That caused further delay.

There has been some suggestion that the entire fault for the delays lies with the groups because of their lack of knowledge of INTERREG IVa and lack of experience of controlling major spend projects. However, in the past, the groups satisfactorily handled major spend under INTERREG IIIa, and, if training was necessary — a point that has already been made — why was that not arranged?

On 6 January 2010, Mr Colgan of the SEUPB, in his evidence to the Committee for Finance and Personnel, admitted:

"We were all learning as we were going along."

He also flagged up a risk with the Dublin Government on the amount of money being spent on consultants. The Dublin Government are looking critically at any money that is spent in that way, and, as they are part of the funding mix with our Government, any further delay could have a detrimental effect on the future of projects. Both Governments will be tightening up on all expenditure.

I am concerned that there is still no money on the ground despite three years of bureaucracy. I am also concerned that the N+2 targets will not be met and that not all the funds will be delivered. We need all the financial infrastructure that we can obtain for the benefit of the economy this year. I know that the Minister will agree with

that. It is now time to deliver without any further blame-game tactics.

Mr Neeson: I support the motion. Like other Members, I am concerned at the delays in giving approval for INTERREG IVa projects, which the SEUPB is responsible for assessing. However, according to the Department, the delays are mainly because of insufficient detail on multimillion-pound funding commitments. Developing the amount of detail required has become burdensome for applicants. Like the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I must ask whether more assistance can be given to applicants in making their applications.

It is only right that the SEUPB must be satisfied that projects are sustainable and viable. I am aware that a number of project applications arrived at the same time and that that has created problems for the SEUPB. I am concerned that some of the tourism signature projects have been affected by the delays. In the present economic climate, tourism has taken on a more significant role in developing the economy. It is really up to DETI and the SEUPB to ensure that they have the necessary resources to deal with applications. The sooner they do that, the better it will be for all.

Mr Weir: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council, which is involved with the groups concerned. However, I do not have the same detailed or intimate knowledge on the matter as, for example, Leslie Cree, who has been more directly involved. Although I welcome the opportunity to debate the motion, it is regrettable that it had to be tabled at all. If things were running smoothly, there would not have been the need to table such a motion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, who moved the motion, said that responsibility for the matter falls, to some extent, to DFP and DETI. She indicated that the Committee had the opportunity to meet SEUPB representatives some time ago. Indeed, a few months ago, the Chairpersons and the Deputy Chairpersons of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment held a joint meeting with SEUPB representatives. We had hoped then that the various problems could have been ironed out and sorted out behind the scenes. If that had been the case, today's motion would have

been unnecessary. Unfortunately, we are not at that position.

I welcome Mr Cree's remarks. He indicated that, although we want to see the maximum effort and ensure that DFP and DETI help to push matters forward, the fault seems to lie elsewhere, particularly between SEUPB and some of the applying groups. Like other Members, I am not aware of the pure level of detail. It may not serve us well — Mr Cree called it a blame game — to get too much detail. From a cursory glance, it is clear that certain issues about the quality of information have arisen from some applications. Moreover, the SEUPB has, perhaps, moved the goalposts midstream. From that point of view, if we were to engage in a blame game, there is maybe an argument that the blame could be spread around.

The issue is one of balance. Some criticisms have been levelled against previous European funding projects to the effect that there has been insufficient scrutiny; that, in many ways, public money was, at times, wasted; and that projects that were not sustainable were funded. That has led to questions about how much value, particularly in Northern Ireland, people have gained from the projects. Therefore, it is important to put proper structures in place that ensure that applications are thorough, viable and sustainable. There needs to be thorough checking. The question is, when we are putting those structures in place, whether the balance is entirely right and whether the process is too rigorous and could create problems in the other direction, such as delays.

The role of the local groups is, to some extent, an intermediary one, and the issue is about particular projects on the ground. I have spoken to people in local councils and in the voluntary and community sector who have experienced the delays, and it is clear that they are not particularly interested in where the blame lies. Their concern is that the money does not appear to have been spent swiftly enough. Consequently, we must take every possible action to ensure that it is spent. I have confidence that the targets for overall spend will, ultimately, be met. However, we must ensure that those targets are met as quickly as possible because, at the moment, despite the assurances that have been given, there is still a feeling of concern and uncertainty.

When we deal with, for example, Peace programme funding, it is important to provide people with peace of mind and reassurance. I am confident in DFP and DETI's ongoing work to try to push matters forward, and, from that point of view, I look forward to the Minister's remarks. All of us want a situation, across the board, in which money is spent well and in a way that is sustainable, viable and timely.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Weir: We should ensure that that is the case.

Mr McHugh: As a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I raised this issue at an early stage in relation to my area. I have received feedback from groups and councils, and there are concerns about many issues, which quite a few Members have outlined. As Peter Weir said, some matters, such as the blame game, need to be ironed out, and I support the motion. I think that the question of scrutiny has already been sorted out. The SEUPB and all such groups have been in business so long that they know exactly what they are doing. There should be no blame game. However, we are hearing different things from the representatives of SEUPB and from the people on the ground. That is why the concern arose, and that concern has not been allayed.

The meeting of targets was mentioned. That is not happening. Therefore, principally, I have questions about the whole enterprise. There are three parts to the multi-annual programmes. The enterprise part is progressing; others can tell me otherwise, if that is not the case.

There are also the tourism and collaboration parts. ICBAN submitted proposals on the annual plans well over two years ago. Indeed, it was mentioned that those were submitted three years ago, which may be closer to the mark. However, there is no sign of anything coming from those proposals. An update was given recently after one had been requested, but I do not think that groups in our area have even been given letters of offer to say what is happening, what they will get, and so on.

12.30 pm

Fermanagh has a large geo-park, and there is an uplands project, which involves Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Fermanagh working together to

upgrade forest parks, trails and other tourist attractions. This is the tourism season, but we are losing ground because the upgrades have not happened. People are available to do the work, but the funding is not there for them to do it. Groups have not been able to apply elsewhere for funding. If a group expects funding from one source but does not get it, it cannot really apply to several other sources, because the system does not work like that. The aforementioned projects are key to attracting future tourism, including for next year, yet they may not happen. Will there be time to spend the money even if we do get it?

When will those matters be cleared up? Why has there been such a delay? Why has it taken so long? It has been said that funding will be cut from €5 million to €3 million. Why is the funding being messed with in that way? I ask the Minister whether a date has been set on which there will be movement. June has been mooted, but will groups be told that they will receive funding in June? Is there a North/South programme in place? The South is due to contribute 25%, so will budget restrictions in the South affect the overall funding? Let us know whether that is causing delay. How much funding is in place? How much will there be to spend? Areas need to know the answers to those questions, because some groups that hope to work on programmes later are struggling to remain in place now.

ICBAN, councils and others want answers to those key questions. They want to know when funding will be received, how much money is in place and whether the North/South element has caused problems and delays. We want to know all that urgently. I will leave it at that.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): It would be dishonest of me to say that I welcome the debate, because I would rather be out electioneering. However, we will get it over with as quickly as possible. I thank Members for being brief, because it is a nice day for getting around the doors. There are plenty of people to speak to and plenty of stories to tell them. I have looked forward to going around the doors of East Antrim to tell people how Northern Ireland's Budget will come under severe pressure if the leader of the new Ulster Conservatives and Unionists group comes into power at Westminster after 6 May. However, let me get on with the business in hand, Mr Speaker, before you call me to order.

I am a bit disappointed at the debate, or at least at the motion. The speeches have not reflected the harshness of the motion. When Members look at the issue, at how much of the INTERREG IVa money has been spent and at the impact that that spend is already having on the ground, they will see that the accusation of long and continuing delays is not a fair assessment. INTERREG IVa funding amounts to more than €200 million. I hate it when the figures are given in euro. I thought that they had all been converted for me, but they have not. Therefore, I will have to use euro, but I assure Members that this will be the last time. I will try to make quick calculations as I go.

There is about £220 million of funding in INTERREG IVa. Most of the comments that have been made this afternoon have concerned the part of the programme that refers to local authority groups. That accounts for about one quarter of the total funding.

However, to put that in context, 25% of INTERREG IVa's budget was spent in its first year. Up to now, 40% of the budget has been spent. Although Mr Cree talked about us missing our N+2 targets, the truth is that we have exceeded them by about 20%. That is the context in which I want to put the situation. As a result of the money that has been spent, many projects are in place and are benefiting local communities.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for the information that he has imparted. The motion is not unduly critical, nor is it critical of any of the Executive Ministers. It exhorts two key Ministers — the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — to work together. It is undeniable that the process has been protracted; I am sure that the Minister does not deny that. It is also undeniable that a number of previously viable projects have collapsed as a result of that protraction, and that is regrettable.

Although I welcome the assurance that the full budget will be allocated by June 2010, it could be interpreted at European Commission level that the fact that it took so long to spend the money — right up against the deadline — indicates that it is not as relevant and important as it should be. Does the Minister agree that it would be regrettable if we were to send a divided message from this House? We are not criticising the local allocation. We are criticising

the methodology behind the making of those decisions and the fact that it took so long for groups to receive the technical assistance that would have allowed them to meet changing circumstances. Does the Minister see things from that perspective?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member makes an important point about the methodology, and I will come to that. I wanted, first, to set out the context. The situation is not as bleak as it has been portrayed. Many projects have already started and are making an impact; they are spending money and providing services in local areas. The first of the five projects was approved in 2008. They included an enterprise project — an engineering initiative called KITE — worth €3 million; a €5 million energy project called BioMara; the €30 million Kelvin telecommunications project; and the €26 million budget for the Putting Patients First programme, which brought together a number of cross-border health initiatives that were designed to address key health priorities.

Projects are in place that are directly benefiting communities, delivering economic benefits such as jobs, skills and investment, and enhancing service delivery. However, a number of issues have been raised about the local authorities side of the equation, which accounts for about a quarter of the budget. We regard that as an important part of the INTERREG programme. Indeed, Members have drawn to my attention concerns that they have about some of the local authority projects. I have met representatives of those projects on a number of occasions to hear those concerns, to ensure that the SEUPB is aware of them and of surrounding issues, and to try to address them.

I want to make some things clear. There has been some talk about the changing of rules and how some people thought that the production of the multiannual plans was sufficient to draw down funding. They thought that, therefore, the funding should have been paid out. My understanding is that that was never the intention. I will explain to Members why it could not possibly have been the case.

The high-level multi-annual plans indicated the kinds of global figures expected to have been spent across the areas covered by the groups. The bids were for more than €200 million, but only €60 million was available. Some sifting would have been necessary because €60 million had

been ring-fenced and was available but the applications were for more than €200 million.

It was always understood, or least it should always have been understood, that the inclusion of a project in a multi-annual plan did not mean that it should go ahead. There were other considerations, such as whether the project represented value for money, duplicated an existing project or fitted in with SEUPB objectives.

The impression given by some Members, including the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and Mr Cree, was that undue delay was introduced into the process at some later stage because there was a requirement to carry out economic appraisals of the projects. There would have been much more criticism from the House had we spent all that money without some critical economic appraisal of the individual projects that were being put forward.

Economic appraisals for the projects were no different than economic appraisals for all INTERREG projects. Members mentioned that some local authority groups are ahead of others in the way in which they have dealt with projects in their areas: the Irish Central Border Area Network, the North East Partnership and Councils of the Metropolitan Area (COMET) have had projects accepted because they carried out economic appraisals from the start, and £25 million was saved as a result. That means that money will be better spent and that more projects should be acceptable. Almost every Member who contributed to the debate mentioned economic appraisals, but they are essential.

Mr Cree asked one question to which I do not have an answer, and I will come back to him. He said that a promise was given that a template for economic appraisals would be made available to groups. I was not aware of that. If that promise was made, and I take what he said at face value, it seems strange. I am not sure that it is always possible to have a single template for economic appraisals given the multiplicity and variety of projects. However, if that promise was made, I will investigate it. I will find out why such a promise was made in the first place, and although it was an inappropriate promise, I will find out why it was not kept. I will write to the Member.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister agree that if partnerships had been advised that economic appraisals were necessary when multi-annual

plans were being prepared, they could have been done at the same time? That could have saved up to a year.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I accept the Member's point. However, three local partnerships knew about and carried out economic appraisals, which is why some of their projects have been accepted and others have not. I assume that the same information was communicated to all local partnerships. I can only speculate as to what the answer might be. I do not know whether information was misread, groups simply ignored it or thought that appraisals could be done at a future date. There seems to be a disparity in that some groups carried out appraisals and some did not, and, as a result, some groups have moved on much faster than others and have had projects accepted.

12.45 pm

Of the projects submitted, nine have already been approved and 31 are being investigated. It is wrong, therefore, to say that no progress has been made. Of the 61 projects, only 11 were sent back due to a lack of information. I am only making an assumption, but that would indicate that there was a fair knowledge of what was required when a project was submitted. In the light of that, I am not so sure that the allegation that the delay was because insufficient information was available holds water.

Nine projects were rejected on the basis that they were not value for money and did not meet the criteria. It is hoped that the timetable will be such that a decision will be made by the summer on the 31 projects that are still under scrutiny. However, I do not want Members coming back and saying that the Minister made a commitment that those 31 projects would be approved by the summer. They will be looked at by the summer. Given that one in six is being rejected at present, some may well be rejected because they do not meet the criteria. However, the timetable is on target to deal with the issue.

The money from the Irish Republic has been ring-fenced. Even with its budget cuts, there should be no difficulty there for the projects. My last point is about building the capacity of groups. Help has been made available to groups. Of course, accounting departments now get involved at the very start of the project stage. That has been welcomed by local authority groups, and it is one way to ensure

that there is early help available to the groups when they are looking at projects.

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

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I trust that at least most of the questions that Members raised have been answered. I appreciate the spirit of the debate, and I think that we all want to work together to make sure that that money is delivered for Northern Ireland in these constrained economic times —

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The economic times may be more constrained if the party down the road has its way.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I will refrain from electioneering. *[Interruption.]* This matter affects the people of North Belfast very deeply. *[Laughter.]* I am prepared to defend every penny for the people of North Belfast.

I welcome the debate, which is useful and timely, and I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for proposing the motion. I also welcome her remarks, in which she outlined fairly and in detail why the motion is before the House. The concern of, I assume, everyone on the Committee for Finance and Personnel, but most certainly on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, is not to apportion blame, but to try to create movement where movement seems not to have happened. We are not in the business of beating up the SEUPB. We note the good work that that body has done and continues to do. It is not a matter, therefore, of ganging up on and beating up the SEUPB.

The important thing is to try to resolve the issue. Whether or not we have interpreted the factual situation correctly, we gained the impression that there has been excessive and inordinate delay.

That may be the fault of the local authority groups or of the SEUPB. However, the important thing to emphasise is that there has been delay, and everyone wants to move on. The Enterprise Committee and the Finance Committee were lobbied by the local authority groups, and we are most concerned about those groups. The Minister assures us that the rest of INTERREG is going ahead and that things are moving quite

well, and we are reassured by him. We have no issue in relation to that. It is not a matter of allocating blame, and no criticism of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment or of the Department of Finance and Personnel is intended.

Mr Cree reflected the views of most Committee members in his expression of disappointment at the slowness of the process, and he has first-hand experience of that, having been associated with COMET. There is a high level of frustration. I hope that, as a result of this debate, a fresh look will be taken at what is going on and a push will be made towards resolution of the process.

I note that the Minister has said that there are 61 projects, of which nine have been approved, 31 are being investigated and 11 have been sent back for lack of information. I hope that early approval will be given to many of the 31. Obviously, the Minister cannot assure the House that that will happen, but, nonetheless, that is our hope. This process started in 2007, so it has taken a substantial time. Whether or not anyone is to blame, an unacceptably long time has been taken to get money through to local communities.

I am happy to note that the money from the Republic is ring-fenced. It is important that it is guaranteed.

Mr Neeson considered the process to be onerous for applicants, and that reflects the views of the local authority groups. We can all argue the toss about that, but that is what they were telling us, the legislators. Mr Neeson emphasised the importance of the tourism signature projects, which are more susceptible to delays and can be undermined by them.

In his contribution, Mr Weir said that this is a matter of trying to strike a balance. It is necessary to have a level of scrutiny. All in this House support that. We all want to see value for money, and no one wants projects to be pushed through without proper analysis. Mr Weir asked whether we have the balance right, and my colleagues take the view that we have not always got the balance right in relation to this. Local groups are important to development throughout Northern Ireland, and it is important that we engage with and support them.

Mr McHugh described the experience of Fermanagh. Given the particularly difficult

circumstances that they now experience, it is important for the people of Fermanagh that projects such as these are expedited so that they can achieve maximum benefit from them.

I welcome contributions to the debate that were made by other colleagues. I also welcome the Minister's comments on all the issues that were presented to the House.

I reiterate that allocating blame is not important but allocating funds in a timely fashion so that we can get those projects under way is. If the debate has done any good, it will have been to raise that issue as one of concern and frustration for people at a local authority level. Hopefully, it will also impress upon the Minister, the Executive and the Special EU Programmes Body that those projects must be started in a timely fashion.

I thank everyone for their contribution to the debate and I hope that the House will not divide on this issue. The motion was not intended to divide the House but to act as a spur towards the timely completion of those applications.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the long and continuing delays within the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) in processing applications for project funding under the European Union INTERREG IVA programme, especially for those projects relating to enterprise, tourism, energy and telecoms, for which DETI is the accountable Department; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to continue to work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and SEUPB to progress applications without further undue delay to enable good quality projects to be implemented quickly for the benefit of local communities.

Private Members' Business

Caravans Bill: First Stage

Mr McCallister: I beg to introduce the Caravans Bill [NIA 17/09], which is a Bill to amend the law relating to caravans and caravan sites.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Private Members' Business

Development of a Jobs Strategy

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which 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 continued significant impact of job losses across Northern Ireland; notes the need for strategic cross-departmental planning on job protection and creation; and calls for the establishment of a ministerial committee to consider the development, co-ordination and implementation of the recommendations of the independent review of economic policy, the independent review of policy on the location of public sector jobs, the report on the inquiry into public procurement and the report of the MATRIX panel, in order to develop a jobs strategy for the region by September 2010.

I am privileged to propose the motion because, as it states, we all know that we are good with reports. The four listed in the motion relate to the independent review of economic policy, the independent review of policy on the location of public sector jobs, the inquiry into public procurement and the MATRIX panel.

All those inquiries produced useful, well-informed and enlightened reports and very useful recommendations. Unfortunately, we seem to be unable to get a cross-cutting effort here that will allow us to make something of them and to tie them into a single sheaf or bundle that would be relevant to the people who send us to the Assembly.

Many Members are out knocking on doors at the moment to talk to voters, and those who are not out there should be. On doorsteps, I hear that the big, key issue that affects everybody is jobs. People talk to me about jobs: some are worried about their present job, others about that fact that their children — aged 18, 20 or emerging from university at 22 — will not be able to get a job. Still others are concerned that their 16-year-old emerging from a secondary school will not be able to get a job, an apprenticeship or whatever.

1.00 pm

Jobs are the priority for most people, which is easy to understand. They know that they have to earn a living, and they know that they will not be able to go anywhere if they do not have a pound or two in their pockets. It probably takes £10 to buy fish and chips. People want to know how we will protect existing jobs. It is no secret that there is a lot of cynicism around. People are angry and frustrated — perhaps they are best described as being disappointed — that we have not been able to get our act together better and do something more about the economy. The Minister should not think for a moment that I blame only her: I blame all of us. We must get together an economic strategy that delivers for the people who sent us here. We need to create the high value-added jobs that are essential if we are to avail ourselves of the opportunities that the global economy could offer us in the future.

According to the March 2010 labour market report, 28% of Northern Ireland's working-age population is economically inactive. That is very significantly higher than the UK average of about 21% or 21.5%. Northern Ireland is the highest of all of the cited 12 UK regions and subregions. The jobs situation in this recession is particularly bleak for our young people. Nearly 32% of those who claim jobseeker's allowance are under the age of 25. That is scary. So much young talent, enthusiasm and energy are being wasted. Young people have been parked and left watching television when they could be doing something useful for the broader community and earning money for themselves.

Unemployment is not just an economic blow; it can strike a real psychological blow and seriously undermine young people's confidence, self-esteem, expectations and hopes for the future. The Executive and their associated agencies have taken steps, but individual isolated action from one corner of the Executive or one of the various agencies without joined-up government and a coherent, cross-cutting strategy is little more than "ad hoc-ery" and does not deliver the full benefit or potential. If we continue with this piecemeal approach, it will continue to produce the same limited and poor results.

The frustrating thing is that the strategies all exist; it is a question of tying them together. Considerable thought, time and energy have gone into producing a series of robust strategic

recommendations, many of which are referred to in the motion. Those recommendations have been shown to have dramatically improved the economic performance of other countries that were once in a similar position to us, yet many of those strategies are left on shelves gathering dust. One example is the much talked-about green new deal, which was brought together by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Sustainable Development Commission. If all of that were pursued to the last detail and implemented here, it could create up to 30,000 jobs in maintaining and sustaining our environment. If we are serious about protecting jobs and creating new high value-added jobs, we need to be comprehensive and strategic in our approach.

As one strategy document after another points out, it is only by building dynamic partnerships among businesses, government and the education sector that Northern Ireland will be equipped to successfully compete in the high value-added global economy and markets. Those partnerships need to be driven by a central point in government, as the independent review of economic policy document advised. We can no longer afford to produce more and more academic papers that are left to gather dust. We must get together an action plan, and we must act and make things happen. Going back to the green new deal, a range of Departments are doing a lot of good work, but, somehow or other, we are unable to bring it all together.

If we are to attract greater foreign investment, we must invest in people. In order to attract young people to STEM subjects, schools must promote them actively as leading to exciting and rewarding careers. To stop the brain drain, the number of university places here must be increased. Far too many young people are forced to leave Northern Ireland for a university education, and many of them never return. We need to give serious support to innovative entrepreneurs and to all the spin-off opportunities. To attract international investors, we need a competitive rate of corporation tax, which has been much discussed in recent times and is undergoing a second coming. Our thinking and planning must be ambitious and courageous. The experts are here, but, to create investment and action, we must bring their thinking together. We must use the downturn to gear up for the upturn when it comes. We must get more of our people skilled to a higher

level so that they can avail themselves of those upturn opportunities when they happen.

I am not just concentrating on new opportunities. We must protect existing jobs. For example, there is a desperate need to get the construction industry going again and to make things happen, because so many people have suffered. In the past two or three months, I have heard many stories about desperate people who are prepared to do drastic things to survive.

We must improve further our tourism product, because we could do a lot better. We have the impression that we are the most wonderful and hospitable people that the world has ever produced. Unfortunately, many tourists think that our hospitality could be much better. We spend too much time congratulating ourselves, rather than asking how we could improve.

I shall not go on, because other people want to speak. Mr Speaker, I thank you for affording me the opportunity to propose the motion and to make those points. I beg my Assembly colleagues, from all parties and none, to get their act together in order to create jobs. People send us here not because we are wonderful or good-looking — some of us are not — but to deliver. In the past month on the doorsteps, I have heard nothing except “What are you going to do up there?”, “Why don't you get off your backsides and do something about jobs?” and “Too many people are unemployed”. I make an earnest plea to the Minister: get things going by setting up a ministerial Committee to pull everything together.

Mr Bell: I welcome this important motion. If the House cannot deliver real jobs and help to secure and protect existing jobs when it has the capacity and the means to do so, we should not be here.

I shall divide my speech into two parts. First, I shall look at the carrot, namely the good work that a listening Minister has done for the economy and what has been achieved by investing not insignificant sums — millions of pounds — to address the crisis in which we find ourselves. Secondly, I shall look at the proposals that will emerge shortly from the Ulster Unionists and Conservatives. Having the name Bell, I thought that only a bell could clang, but Cameron's proposal to cut £200 million from the Northern Ireland economy is a real clanger. Where are the Conservatives? They are not even in the House today. As we face losing

£200 million from our economy, only one Member has been sent to the debate. That is the Ulster Unionist and Conservative response to a jobs and economy crisis. I hope that they will tell us, on top of the 3% efficiencies, where the £200 million will be taken from. Tell us the truth. What nurses and midwives will they make unemployed? In the elderly care sector, where will they take away care? Will they tell us where they will cut public sector jobs in the childcare sector, an area in which we have had child abuse scandals? Let there be no mistake: listen to what Cameron said. It is in black and white. He told Jeremy Paxman that, midterm, he would cut £200 million out of the Northern Ireland economy. The only interpretation that any reasonable person could make of that is that, if someone is ordered by his or her boss in London to take £200 million midterm, when spending plans are committed and when jobs have been committed, jobs will have to be slashed.

Mr Speaker: Order. I give all Members quite a bit of latitude, but I insist that the Member comes back to the motion.

Mr Bell: The motion is about jobs and what we are going to do to protect jobs. Approximately 12% of the Northern Ireland economy is dependent on public sector jobs. Let us be clear: Northern Ireland's job promotion in the public sector is largely no different from that in Wales or in any other comparable region in England. If, therefore, we are talking about a jobs strategy to increase jobs at a time when £200 million is going to be taken out of the economy and when jobs are going to be slashed, my point is directly relevant.

I thank the Minister for what she did: she listened, and she acted quickly. The House launched two major initiatives, the first of which was the accelerated fund. We are not talking pennies; we are talking £5 million that was put into the accelerated fund to help where necessary. The Minister may correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that that £5 million has been fully committed and that it has been used. The House has delivered £5 million into the accelerated fund, and that sum has been further committed. A listening Minister responded. That is why devolution is right for Northern Ireland, despite the critics. Not only did Minister Foster listen but she responded with an accelerated fund and with the short-term aid scheme. We are not talking insignificant amounts of money in that initiative either. In fact, we are talking

about some £15 million. If I am not mistaken, 30 of our companies have used the short-term aid scheme and drawn down the money that is available. Companies have already drawn down almost £3.7 million to look at the diagnostics and at what can be done. That is the proper response.

We are — rightly in many ways — critical friends of Invest Northern Ireland. We can be critical friends, but, equally, we have to acknowledge that, in the previous financial year from April 2009, Invest Northern Ireland contributed to the securing of 2,200 jobs in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland should not be bullied. It should not be taken as a set-apart. We will be reasonable with the cuts that have to be made to the public sector in these economic times, but we cannot be taken out for special treatment. The Cameron clanger of taking £200 million and putting nurses and teachers on the dole is a no-brainer.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion. We should add to the work of the Economic Reform Group, which was led by, amongst others, George Quigley and Mike Smyth, the referenced reports that the Assembly, Assembly Ministers and Committees generated. That group made a timely and important contribution to the consideration of this matter.

I find that there is considerable common ground between the parties on this issue. The Assembly has agreed, as its priority, that we should grow the economy. That will remain the focus of the Assembly going forward, when global economic circumstances permit. As a result of the economic decline, we perforce have to concentrate to the best of our ability on defending and protecting the jobs that exist and retaining them in the economy. All that comes back to the question of whether the Assembly has the necessary equipment in its toolkit to achieve those goals.

1.15 pm

We have no choice in the matter. The recent, unfortunate comments from Mr Cameron gave some indication of Whitehall's view of this region. Despite common ground between parties and the fact that it was an all-party group that raised the issue of corporation tax variation, which would give the Assembly the ability to compete for inward investment,

the prevailing view from the Treasury and the Whitehall officials who advise the ministerial team at Westminster is that they are more than generous to the region. Their view repudiates our argument that, in fact, the Executive have been set up to fail in their goal of economic growth because they do not have sufficient tools in their armoury and do not have a sufficient budget to bring a community and an economy out of many years of conflict and division.

The argument has come round full circle. I welcome the fact that, despite initial reticence, there appears to be emerging consensus in the comments of Members from all parties represented in the Assembly that tax-varying powers and the ability to address the issue of corporation tax are, indeed, desirable. The sentiment that we should be careful what we wish for has begun to take on a much more realistic consideration of our ability to manage the economy in our own interests, as opposed to being required to work within the constraints of a one-size-fits-all approach which, I think, was designed primarily for south-east England. The presumption is that, if it works in that region, it will work everywhere else. The evidence demonstrates otherwise.

The Assembly needs to take the motion's action point about the setting up of a ministerial team, which, in essence, means a ministerial task force; begin to develop that consensus to the point of proposals that we can take back to the incoming British Government, whoever they may be; and begin to put forward our case to be able to invest in recovery, rather than to preside, into the foreseeable future, over circumstances where there is the continual threat of reduction in the budget and the cake to be divided. It is a clear choice: do we want to be proactive and act with self-determination and our own judgement on what is best for the economy, or do we want to continue to preside over the process, which is hardly a budgetary process, of dividing a cake that is getting smaller by the month in order to ensure that there is equitable division between various Departments? Therefore, I urge the House to support the motion and to take it forward in a strategic approach to achieve more powers for the Assembly.

Mr Cree: For the past two years, Northern Ireland has faced a precarious economic position, mired in instability and uncertainty. As Assembly Members, it is our duty to recognise

and react to our constituents' concerns and to do what we can to help.

The current position in Northern Ireland is that 53,000 people are unemployed. More than 500,000 people of working age are economically inactive. That means that in Northern Ireland just 68% of adults who are of working age are employed, compared with 72% in the UK as a whole. The people of west Belfast have been hit hardest, with an unemployment rate of 9%. Those figures demonstrate that it is vital that we take active steps towards the development of a jobs strategy.

Progress has been made towards assessing the current state of the economy. It has succeeded in producing essential information and recommendations for policy decisions. The recommendations made by the reports mentioned in the motion must be studied and, where appropriate, taken into account as we enact economic policies. Our decisions on the matter are so important that it is entirely in order — indeed, desirable — for the Executive to establish a subcommittee whose sole priority is the development, co-ordination and implementation of the recommendations.

Over the weekend, there was considerable coverage of our desire to see Northern Ireland's economy rebalanced from public sector dominance to a revitalised and expanded private sector. There has been considerable misquoting, even today, and irresponsible comment, so I want to take some time to establish the facts. The public sector soaks up the vast majority of economic activity in Northern Ireland. The high level of economic inactivity plays a role in that, but the fact that a majority of jobs in Northern Ireland are in the public sector also plays a major part. That is unsustainable.

Public services are vital, and the Ulster Unionist Party and the Conservative Party are their keen defenders. However, those services do not pay for themselves. The state requires a strong private sector to pay for and maintain public services. A situation in which the state accounts for 70% of economic activity is not sustainable, as the First Minister recognised in 2006. As a result, any jobs strategy that emerges from this useful motion will rely, to a large extent, on building the private sector in precisely the manner that David Cameron outlined on Friday. It will not require immediate and massive cuts

to public services in the hope that the private sector can plug the hole. It will require action —

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: No.

It will require action to make Northern Ireland a better and easier place in which to do business and to build up the private sector so that it can gradually take over as the driving force of our economy. That is what all of us in this place want to see. However, it is worth noting that only my party has the opportunity to be part of a national Government and influence taxation policies that will achieve the goal of making Northern Ireland a better place in which to do business.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that Members' minds may be somewhere other than in the Chamber, but I really stress that the Member should, as far as possible, keep to the content of the motion.

Mr Cree: I apologise for going along the same track as Mr Bell, but I could not resist it.

I support the motion and the plans to ensure that, over time, the private sector will drive the economy.

Mr Neeson: I support the motion. I am not electioneering — I am not even a candidate — but I believe that David Cameron's remarks at the weekend did not help the situation.

I agree entirely on the need for cross-departmental planning on job protection and creation. In essence, we require the development of joined-up government. All Departments have a responsibility to develop the economy. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has welcomed the independent review of economic policy.

The Alliance Party firmly believes that the green economy provides major opportunities for job creation in Northern Ireland. Harland and Wolff has shown the importance of the green economy through its production of wind turbines.

The motion is all-embracing, and I hope that Alasdair McDonnell will not take exception to my saying that I am disappointed that the reduction in corporation tax in Northern Ireland does not form part of it. Northern Ireland must become more competitive. However, like Dr McDonnell, I

hope that we will have the opportunity to debate that issue in the Assembly in the near future.

Given the present economic climate, it is vital that we develop a jobs strategy for the region as soon as possible. As I said in the previous debate, tourism provides major opportunities to create jobs and grow the economy. I particularly welcome the go-ahead for the signature projects that will benefit many areas of Northern Ireland and a recent letter from the chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund that highlighted the tourism opportunities that our heritage and heritage sites provide.

I welcome the motion and hope that there will be significant cross-departmental co-operation in growing the economy.

Mr Hamilton: I also support the motion. We sometimes think that creating jobs and delivering new jobs and inward investment in Northern Ireland is simply about growing our economy, but the important point that we always need to focus on is that it is not simply about creating jobs for jobs' sake or for wealth creation, it is about helping the worst off in our society.

As everybody knows, all sorts of social interventions can be made, but the best way out of poverty for an individual or a family is for people to have a good, well-paid job. We should always keep in mind and as our focus the fact that creating jobs is also about lifting people out of poverty. That task, which I would have thought that we would have all subscribed to, has been made all the more difficult by the global recession.

I do not want to re-rehearse some of the figures that others have touched on, but I will say that the 25% increase in our unemployment level, bringing it to 56,000, has certainly hit families all across Northern Ireland quite severely. That figure is not as bad as the figures for other regions. Indeed, our total figure is comparable with some of the monthly increases in unemployment in the Republic of Ireland, for example. Our unemployment figure being less than the UK average is a far cry from the days when unemployment in Northern Ireland was regularly in and around 15%. That, therefore, shows a big change.

Even though those jobs have been lost, that has happened very much in spite of decisive action taken by the Executive, not only in prioritising the economy and economic growth

in the Programme for Government but through investing record amounts in our infrastructure. That investment includes the £3 billion of procurement at central government level annually and another £500 million at local government level. That shows the difficult task that we all, particularly the Executive, face.

I regularly speak to people from companies and firms across Northern Ireland who tell us that, even though times are tough and they are still having difficulties and having to shed numbers, if it were not for that investment in infrastructure and the procurement regularly coming from the public sector, they would be in real, severe trouble. It is worth acknowledging, as it is sometimes overlooked, that even in spite of all the difficulties since devolution returned Invest Northern Ireland has been able to attract and secure something like 10,000 foreign direct investment jobs in Northern Ireland. That is in spite of everything that has gone on and proves that, even in this very difficult climate, Northern Ireland is still a good place for people to do business.

I, certainly, want to see the contents of the motion being carried forward and a good jobs strategy for Northern Ireland put in place. However, what we cannot have is, on one side of the equation, the Executive, our Ministers, doing their best to create jobs in Northern Ireland if, at the other end, the rug is being pulled from under Northern Ireland's feet so that we are forced to lose jobs. That is what we face. I do not think that there is anybody here, no matter what Bench they sit on, who can honestly, hand on heart, say that pulling the rug of public finances from under Northern Ireland will help a jobs strategy at all. What will not help Northern Ireland are the severe, savage, deep and early cuts that are being put forward by the Tory and Unionist party. It is not a matter of misinterpretation. It is a matter of fact that the Tory and Unionist party has said that it wants to cut £6 billion from the public sector in 2010-11. Our share of that would be roughly £150 million to £200 million, as Mr Bell said earlier. Can anyone imagine saying to our Departments mid-year, as we are trying to create jobs and shore up the jobs that we do have, that our public sector is to take cuts of £200 million in this financial year?

The point was made that that is not something that is going to happen immediately, but the Tory and Unionists' own manifesto says that there is an overwhelming case for starting early

and that that party would have an emergency Budget within 50 days. That is what is going to savagely and severely cut away at our Budget in Northern Ireland. What help is it to the creation of jobs in Northern Ireland to cut so severely and savagely at our budgets? What help is it to the creation of jobs in Northern Ireland to lay off nurses or schoolteachers or to be forced to lay off classroom assistants? Those who are voluntarily taking the Tory Whip are lining up to make Northern Ireland the whipping boy for the Tory party.

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

Mr Hamilton: Neither I nor my party will subscribe to that. I thought that we were all pulling in the same direction in the Chamber, but it seems that there are some who are quite happy to subscribe to making Northern Ireland the whipping boy of the Tory Party.

1.30 pm

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion, and I thank those who proposed it for doing so. Once again, we are debating job losses at a time when more people are becoming unemployed. It was announced recently that some workers at Quinn Insurance will lose their jobs, and we will also have the sale of the First Trust Bank. We are debating the motion under that shadow.

Members have already referred to reports that have been published recently. However, we must go beyond strategies and reports, because strategies and reports that sit on shelves will not make any difference to people. The report of the independent review of economic policy provides evidence that we need to bring about a new approach to developing the economy. Some Members said that the issue is not just about creating jobs to grow the economy but about creating jobs to take people out of poverty. Tackling disadvantage and need is a challenge. I, along with other Members, attended a seminar on fuel poverty in the Stormont Hotel this morning. One in two households is now living in fuel poverty, compared with one in three previously. Poverty is growing, and more children than ever are living in severe poverty in the North. Therefore, it is important to sustain jobs, because that affects people and their families, and there is hardship if jobs are lost. We must find ways of creating new jobs.

The report of the independent review of economic policy illustrated that there is a clear need to push the SME sector and to grow the export potential of existing businesses. It also highlighted that the challenge is to deliver better jobs and prosperity and to tackle poverty and disadvantage.

Remarks have been made about how we use public money to grow the economy, and west Belfast, in particular, was referred to. There are areas of disadvantage and need, such as west and north Belfast and west of the Bann, that organisations like Invest NI have let down over previous years, and that must change. We need investment in all areas across the North.

We must have a new and innovative way of thinking if we are to sustain jobs. There must be a mix of different jobs, as too many jobs have not been secure and have offered low wages, which has done nothing to raise living standards or to tackle the poverty and inequality at the heart of our economy.

The social economy sector is important as it has the potential to reduce deprivation and to increase labour force participation, particularly in areas of disadvantage and need, while, at the same time, regenerating local communities. That potential is not being realised. The social economy sector has not been given enough financial investment, and sometimes it receives only lip service. If we are serious about trying to develop and grow the social economy sector, we must be realistic and put in the required financial investment.

My colleague Mitchel McLaughlin referred to the fact that we cannot keep on trying to develop and grow when economic agencies, North and South, are competing for investment and developing unco-ordinated strategies. Reference was made to the separate corporation taxes, North and South. We can no longer stand over having two separate economic systems on an island this size. It is not practical any more; it does not make economic sense. We could do so much more to retain existing jobs and to create new jobs if we acted in a more co-ordinated fashion, North and South, developed co-ordinated services and put an end to existing inefficiencies.

I am certainly not talking about making further cuts to front line services, but cutting the real inefficiencies.

Mr Speaker: The Member should draw her remarks to a close.

Ms J McCann: OK.

A raft of other measures could be considered, such as how the use of social clauses could help in public procurement, and the way in which the investment strategy works. We must use that double-edged sword —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms J McCann: We must sustain employment, create new jobs and combat and tackle poverty.

Mr Weir: I welcome the debate. There is no issue more pressing to the people of Northern Ireland than jobs, and the events of the past week have brought that sharply into focus. I note that the motion makes reference to both the protection and creation of jobs. It is important that both sides of that coin are tackled, and a wide range of activities have been led by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in an attempt to secure and protect jobs.

We must be cognisant of the overall jobs picture. Although the focus has been on the private sector and the importance of and need to grow that sector, there must also be protection of public sector jobs. Therefore, I was very disconcerted by the recent comments that were made by the Conservative leader, which will have major impact on jobs here. During the past few days, various Ulster Unionist spokesmen have tried to use an imaginative reinterpretation or, to use a film term, reimagining of what was said, but rather than an accidental gaffe, the comments of the Conservative leader on Friday were really a slipping of the mask on public sector jobs. Today, a spokesperson reading out a prepared text on behalf of the Conservative and Ulster Unionist parties said that they will not slash public sector spending or jobs. However, David Cameron and Reg Empey are inextricably linked, and rather than trying to prevent the slashing of public sector jobs, they are the Freddy Kruegers of the Northern Ireland economy: cutting, cutting and cutting again. That is what we face in the area of public sector jobs.

When devolution was re-established in Northern Ireland, it was right that the Executive placed the economy at the heart of their Programme for Government. That was done before the worldwide economic tsunami, and the key commitment to grow the Northern Ireland

economy is as relevant today as it was a number of years ago.

The wide range of activities that have been introduced in an attempt to counteract the recession have already been mentioned, and include the use of the accelerated support fund and the short-term aid scheme under which millions of pounds have been spent wisely to ensure that our jobs are protected and supported. Over £100 million has also been spent by Invest NI during the past number of years, with the dividend of attracting hundreds of millions of pounds — perhaps over £1 billion — of new investment to Northern Ireland. If the Conservatives and Unionists are untrammelled in implementing their plans, it will be schemes such as those that will face the axe because, when considering government spending and what is absolutely necessary in areas such as health and education, an undue burden will be placed on schemes that offer added value.

The work that has been undertaken by my colleague Arlene Foster, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, has provided a cushion against the recession, which shows the value of devolution. However, there are some in our society, at both ends of the political spectrum, who seek to wreck that good work at a time when it is clear that devolution is of benefit.

Although worthy, the motion has been somewhat overtaken by events, and, as I understand it, the Executive have already agreed to establish the subcommittee that is called for. It seems that some Members have not been as well informed by their Ministers as we on the DUP Benches, but I will leave that issue until a later stage.

I welcome the Committee for Finance and Personnel's report on its inquiry into public procurement, which other Members mentioned. That issue must be considered.

References were made to the Bain report, but I add a note of caution. The relocation of public sector jobs is not particularly applicable or beneficial at this stage. Implementation of the report would be an expensive luxury of £40 million, which would not create new jobs but simply shift jobs around the Province. We must move away from a zero-sum game —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is coming to a close.

Mr Weir: We must move away from a zero-sum game of seeing which areas of Northern Ireland get jobs towards creating more jobs for Northern Ireland for the future. I support the motion.

Mr McDevitt: We are encouraged by the support that our party's motion is receiving from all sides of the House. However, the issue is not whether we all agree to the motion but why the motion is before us. As Mr Weir and other Members said, the economy is at the heart of the Programme for Government, but, despite that, and this is not only my opinion but the opinion of independent experts, that has not led to change. Placing the economy at the heart of the Programme for Government has not led to an improvement in economic performance, to a better jobs strategy or to a closer integration of innovation, skills and economic development. As I said, that is not only my opinion but that of the members of the independent review team and of senior businesspeople across the region. I suspect that, privately, that is many Members' opinion.

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

We need to put the economy at the heart of our regional government. To do that, we will need to rely on not only the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to do her job well. I echo Dr McDonnell's remarks that we do not question that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is committed to doing her job well, but we wonder why the culture of putting the economy at the heart of what we do does not seem to be able to break out of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

For example, 18 months ago, a green new deal paper was submitted, which we have since debated in many other contexts. I think that we can all agree on that paper. Mr Hamilton debates aspects of a green new deal when he debates the boiler scrappage scheme. The report drew on many of the most credible independent voices on the economy in the region, but why, 18 months on, have we still not figured out a way in which to fund its recommendations? The truth is that we do not have a way in which to fund them because we have chosen not to review our Budget, despite the economic downturn.

The motion is as much about how we stimulate economic activity as it is about how committed we are to the concept of economic activity and jobs growth. To stimulate the economy, we will have to make decisions. To do that, we need

a different budgetary framework to the one in which we are operating.

Much that we could do at a regional level we do not do. There is much that we could do that would benefit us and make us more attractive to foreign direct investment. There is much that we could do that would make our skills strategy more relevant and give us the opportunity to provide people in all levels of education with the prospect of a real job at the end of their studies. We could do much to stimulate what we already do well, including core engineering, construction, agri-food and tourism. To do that, we need a new Budget, so we welcome the soon-to-be-announced news that the Executive are to set up a subcommittee to look at jobs.

Yes, the election has been about a four-letter word. However, that word is not “pact” but “jobs”. If the Executive can prove that they are responding to that issue, that will be welcome news. However, they must be capable of going beyond the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in doing so, and they must be willing to do so.

In my final minute, I will pick up on the policy trends that should be to the forefront of conversations at the Executive subcommittee. There is an acknowledgement that we should and must grow the private sector, and we need to find interesting and important ways in which to do so. Mr Neeson spoke about corporation tax, which we did not include in our motion owing to its not being a devolved matter. However, its absence from the motion does not take away from the importance of the issue, because we all share a commitment to changing the rate of corporation tax here.

1.45 pm

It is also about growing the social economy and acknowledging, in a way that most other Governments in these islands do not, that the social economy makes a positive economic contribution, that it has a capital value, and that it does things better, more cheaply and more efficiently than the private sector, or sometimes the public sector, could. Of course, it is also about understanding that the foundation on which we will build in this region is a public sector that we are proud of and the jobs that it creates.

I thank the House for its support for the motion.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion.

Labour force survey after labour force survey points to an increase in unemployment and job losses. One of the documents referred to in the motion, the independent review of economic policy, recognised that Invest NI and DETI policy needed to change. The authors of the report also acknowledged that a reduced rate of corporation tax would help the local economy, which is a recommendation that has support right across the House, but over which we have no influence whatsoever.

The stark reality that many parties continue to ignore is that economic policy and taxation rates are set in Britain in the interests of people from Britain; the interests of people here do not enter into the equation. That is why those powers should be devolved to the Assembly and the Executive, as that is the only way that the interests of our constituents will be served, because we will put them first. We cannot be as competitive as we would like until those powers are devolved, a point that my colleague Mitchell McLaughlin outlined earlier.

We need to strike a balance between foreign direct investment and small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs are the bedrock of the economy, and Invest NI must recognise that and provide support accordingly. We also need greater emphasis on innovation and on research and development.

Other Members referred to the construction industry and construction workers; they need to be back at work and they should be made a key economic driver in a wider sense. In north Antrim alone, more than 1,000 construction workers are in the unemployment queues: that needs to be tackled. Deployed effectively, the construction industry can tackle the high levels of energy inefficiency in homes, businesses and public buildings as well as helping to reduce the high levels of fuel poverty. Those levels are increasing, as my colleague Jennifer McCann outlined.

Economic policy must reflect the need to create green jobs, and it is welcome that there seems to be a degree of consensus in the House in that regard. It must also reflect the need to create renewable energy jobs and ensure that that is accompanied by the necessary research and development — that is crucial. There is an opportunity for us to become pioneers in that

field, which is a goal that the Scottish Executive have already set for themselves. Key to that will be planning policies that allow renewables to flourish. That is another area that requires work.

Economic policy must also reflect the need to tackle regional imbalance, and the independent review of policy on the location of public sector jobs should not be shelved at this difficult economic period. It needs to be embraced. Rural communities in the Ballymena area, for example, should have local access to public sector jobs, and the Executive should prioritise that work. I disagree with Peter Weir: the redeployment of those jobs will have a ripple effect and create other jobs in the six towns that were recommended in the report on small to medium-sized businesses. Areas outside Belfast are, of course, entitled to those jobs, as the report outlines.

The priority for the Executive in the months and years ahead should be primarily to maintain jobs and, of course, create new ones. The economy should remain a priority for the Assembly, and we need to ensure that we look at our opportunities, particularly in the green economy. There is consensus in the House that the green economy should be a priority and that we need to get our heads together and get the relevant Ministers to discuss how we can move the issue forward, how we can learn from other Governments, particularly the Scottish Government, and how we can cut through bureaucracy and other obstacles in our way to ensure that we lead in the field. There are opportunities there, and it is about time that the Executive grasped them.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted to be able to take part in this debate on an issue that is somewhat similar to what we talked about earlier.

A number of Members mentioned the fact that there is no cross-departmental co-operation on developing a jobs strategy. I know that DETI's main priority is to try to deliver on jobs. However, I think that a jobs strategy should take into account the need for all other Departments to co-operate with DETI as well as to collaborate with the Dublin Government on an all-island basis to find out how they intend to roll out their strategy. The Dublin Government have an advantage because of the difference in corporation tax. If we get the £1 billion worth of investment that was mentioned earlier,

we will be doing quite well, regardless of the high level of corporation tax. However, we are disadvantaged, and that is a fact. We need to look at corporation tax and at any advantages that we can have over our global rivals in Europe and further afield. If we want to grow the economy, we will have to consider that. Either we do that for the future in what is a high-cost economy, or we have emigration, which does not offer a lot to young people. We will face constant cuts, and people's standard of living will be downgraded.

Inward investment: I always like to mention that it is Belfast or Fermanagh and South Tyrone. We do not get our fair share there, in terms of moving present government jobs or otherwise. The public sector question has been raised in relation to the political field today. We do not have many public sector jobs in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, so that is not such a worry for us. However, it is obviously a very big thing in this part of the North. That is where it sits.

The issue of renewables has been mentioned. That is a vital area of growth that we should push forward. That is where the Government should spend money; they can put money into that. However, it looks as though the next phase of government will be about spending in the economy or cuts. That seems to be the theme. However, it is not a sound footing on which to start.

The costs in the economy are excessive for businesses. Utilities believe that there should only be upward costs — just push it on up and people will meet it, whatever the cost. Fuel poverty is another thing that was mentioned earlier, and it all comes into that. It costs a fortune to try to run a business here or to even think about starting a business. We talk about entrepreneurs as a possibility, as compared to the public sector. At least those in the public sector can rely on their pensions being paid. There is a fair share of that in government; they do not want to have to support anything beyond short-term jobs.

Places such as west Belfast and parts of Fermanagh have had to move towards the social economy, which is an area of growth. However, it is short-termism. People cannot rely on those jobs to pay their mortgage, because in five minutes, they will be gone and those people will have to apply for something else. Social economy jobs do not have stability — not where

I come from, anyway. That is a big thing when looking at strategies.

The other issue is about Quinn Insurance and job protection. Are we doing enough? The Minister knows about this, because it relates to her area. We could be facing hundreds of immediate job cuts in Enniskillen. I do not know how bad the situation is, but it is bad. People must realise that the region could be decimated, as it was when the railways were removed years ago. It is curious that that infrastructure was removed at a time when we did not have roads. That is a curious thing that happened in the 1950s. Why did it happen?

We could maybe spend money on our roads now given that our quarries and people in that sector, which also provides a lot of jobs, are on the floor at the minute. Maybe that is where government should put some of the money. However, the British Government want to make cuts of hundreds of millions of pounds in every Department and cut the next Budget. The block grant —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McHugh: — which, in essence, is pocket money, is all that we are allowed to spend. We need to consider all that to progress in the future.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I very much welcome the debate, which comes at a hugely important time for the Northern Ireland economy. Members have already commented at length on the nature of difficulties that we face locally, and I will take a while to go through some of those.

First, I will take a few minutes to outline broadly my assessment of current economic conditions before I turn to the specific issue of developing the employment strategy for Northern Ireland. In my capacity of Enterprise Minister, I try to get out as much as possible, not because I do not want to be in the House, but to meet as many companies as possible and to hear about the very real pressures that local businesses continue to face as a result of the downturn.

The number of unemployment benefit claimants has risen significantly over the past 18 months to just under 56,000 in March 2010. That represents a 26% increase from this time last year. However, as Mr Hamilton said, the

Northern Ireland unemployment figure of 6.4% is somewhat lower than that in other regions of the British Isles; we have the joint lowest figure in the UK. The Republic of Ireland's figure is closer to 14% at the moment, whereas the rest of the UK sits at around 8%. However, we will not be complacent about the fact that many people have lost their jobs.

There are some strong sectors in our economy. Members will know about that because they will have read reports in newspapers of announcements of research and development projects and of the creation of jobs at this difficult time. The farming industry and companies such as Almac, Randox and Warner Chilcott, which last week announced an investment of more than £6 million in research and development, are doing well. Furthermore, the agrifood sector is doing very well, and I had the great pleasure to be at Dale Farm recently when we announced a £40 million investment in that company.

I understand why we need to talk about the loss of jobs; that is the case in every region in the world. Mr McDevitt said that he has not seen evidence of us putting the economy at the centre of the Programme for Government. I remind him that a little thing called the worldwide recession hit us just as I became Enterprise Minister, although I must point out that there was no correlation between the two. *[Laughter.]* We have dealt with that issue in a way that would not have been possible under direct rule. I think that Members will acknowledge that.

Members will be aware that the UK economy returned to growth in the fourth quarter of last year. Although I welcome that news, I know that it is difficult for many to reconcile it with the reality of the conditions on the ground. There are tentative signs that elements of the Northern Ireland economy are beginning to stabilise. For example, output in the services and manufacturing sectors have increased, albeit marginally, in the fourth quarter. Moreover, I note that some economic forecasters predict that our local economy will grow over the course of this year. However, as with other recessions, lagging increases in unemployment are also expected. I know how that looks to inward investors. Unlike every other region of the UK, our unemployment figures rose last month. That said, it remains my hope and that of the

Executive that unemployment levels in Northern Ireland will begin to decline.

I want to mention the comments that were made at the weekend. I listened very carefully to some of the debates over the weekend, and I heard members of the public say that they want more investment in tourism. I listened today to Ms McCann and others talking about the value of the social economy. I value the social economy greatly, and I visit some of those projects. I recognise that it makes a real difference to the areas in which they work.

2.00 pm

I look at the amount of work that we have to do in energy. A number of Members have spoken about the green new deal today, and I assume that Mr McDevitt was talking not about the deal in South Belfast but the energy deal. There is huge potential for the development of green energy. Mr McKay said that we need to look more at what is happening in Scotland: we very much keep in touch with Scotland. Indeed, at the last British-Irish Council meeting, we were in contact with Scotland again to see what is going on there and how we can learn from what they do in relation to new jobs.

Some Members may not be totally au fait with the strategic energy interdepartmental working group that I set up not so long ago, but it looks at the potential for green jobs and the whole area of sustainable energy. We have heard a lot today about Departments not being joined up, but every Department in government sits on that interdepartmental working group. One of the subcommittees deals with the potential for green jobs, and Invest Northern Ireland leads on that matter. There is real potential there.

The changes to the Northern Ireland renewables obligation will help to develop the green sector here. We are finalising the strategic energy framework, and it will be out very soon. In a couple of weeks, I will be making a key announcement about a company that is investing in Northern Ireland in relation to new green jobs. Therefore, we are moving ahead with the green jobs agenda. I want to move ahead with that agenda, and I will do it within the Department and in conjunction with other Departments where possible.

Mr Neeson talked about the value of tourism and heritage. I agree with him, because I am a great lover of heritage. When I was Minister of

the Environment, I really enjoyed the work that that Department does to develop our tourism. Many of our signature projects are based in and around the value of heritage.

Programmes have been set in relation to tourism, energy and Invest Northern Ireland, and those programmes need money. We need to stick within the budget that has been set. What sort of impact will £200 million-worth of cuts have on the green new deal, the social economy and my agenda for DETI moving forward if Chopper Cameron gets his way and moves in to deal with our Budget in Northern Ireland in the manner in which he indicated he would over the weekend? We can talk about it in abstract terms but, as a Government Minister here in Northern Ireland, I am very concerned about the impact that it would have on tourism, energy, Invest Northern Ireland and the green new jobs agenda. All those areas will be impacted if the sort of cuts that were mentioned at the weekend are made.

As economy Minister, I want to do all that I can to support the recovery. Indeed, the Department has taken important steps that Members kindly mentioned. As Mr Bell indicated, the accelerated support fund has been totally utilised, and I am very pleased about that. The short-term aid scheme has also been utilised widely by firms, and I am pleased to say that we have offers of assistance out totalling £3.7 million. We continue to make as much as we can of our advisory service, not just for Invest NI clients but for the largest possible number of people across Northern Ireland.

Finally, the importance of Invest Northern Ireland in supporting the labour market at this critical time should be recognised. It is easy to say that Invest Northern Ireland is not doing enough, that it is not doing this and not doing that, but the facts tell a different story. I wish that Members would look at the facts before coming to the House and making allegations against Invest Northern Ireland. It is easy to do that, but a look at the facts shows that Invest Northern Ireland assistance helped to safeguard more than 2,200 jobs between April 2009 and February 2010.

Ms J McCann: Does the Minister have details of how many of those jobs are in areas of disadvantage and need across the North?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In the Member's constituency

of West Belfast, £361,000 was recently offered towards a £3 million investment at the company's Springbank site, which will create 12 new jobs over a base of 26 jobs. The project will generate approximately £250,000 per annum in wages and salaries, and eight positions have already been filled.

During the period, Invest Northern Ireland also assisted in the promotion of almost 3,400 jobs. The Member made a point about an all-Ireland economy and the need for us to re-examine that. If she thinks that going into an economy of five and a half million to six million people is better economically for Northern Ireland than being in an economy of 60 million people, given the export value that we can place on our goods in that economy, she should go back to nursery school economics and start again.

Invest Northern Ireland's actions complement a wider range of actions that it, DETI and the Executive have taken, including a £44.5 million package of measures that was announced in December 2008. However, let us look at the economic strategy and the jobs strategy, which is the subject of the motion. We will continue to support local businesses in the short term, but Members will recall that I asked for an independent review of economic policy. The motion calls for the establishment of a ministerial committee to develop a jobs strategy for Northern Ireland, but we have already taken steps in that regard.

In my statement to the Assembly on 25 January 2010 on the independent review of economic policy, I announced some strategic decisions on the future direction of the economy. I said that Members would have to make the choice between looking for high-value jobs, dealing with productivity issues and simply looking for jobs for their constituencies. I see no evidence that that debate has started on some Benches.

I supported the recommendation of the independent review to set up an Executive subcommittee to be chaired by me and to prioritise action on the economy by developing an overarching economic strategy. I am pleased to confirm that the Executive agreed to those proposals at our meeting on 15 April 2010. The subcommittee has been established, and I will chair the first meeting on 20 May 2010. Its membership includes the Minister for Employment and Learning, the Minister for Regional Development, the Minister of Finance

and Personnel and the Minister of Education, and OFMDFM will be represented at junior Minister level. At our first meeting, a key focus will be to consider the steps required to develop urgently a new economic strategy that will include short- and longer-term issues.

The independent review of economic policy recommended that the strategy should be an overarching one that builds on its findings and shapes and aligns with other Executive strategies. That is the correct approach. Tackling unemployment and providing increased employment opportunities will undoubtedly be key priorities, particularly given the present economic conditions. However, a strategy to address those issues should be developed not in isolation but as part of the broader economic strategy work that I have already initiated.

Increasing employment, promoting enterprise, developing skills, encouraging greater innovation in research and development and improving economic infrastructure are all closely interrelated and should be considered as such. That is one reason why those Ministers will sit on the subcommittee. Therefore, the new economic strategy will need to reflect not only on the independent review but on the MATRIX report, as the motion suggests. It will also have to take a strategic approach to skills, infrastructure, planning and other areas that are directly relevant to the economy.

It is no secret that I am not a lover of the Bain proposals. They did not take into account the new telecommunications infrastructure that was coming into Northern Ireland. I am sure that Mr McHugh has considered the Bain proposals in relation to Enniskillen. They are limited and, therefore, make for a dated piece of work that must be re-examined. Furthermore, the Finance Minister has made it clear that he believes that implementing the Bain proposals at a cost of £40 million is not affordable. He believes that relocating existing jobs, rather than creating new jobs, is not a good use of public funds, and I agree.

I join Sammy Wilson in welcoming the Committee for Finance and Personnel's comprehensive report on public procurement. The report makes many useful recommendations, and I hope that we will be able to use it.

Steps have already been taken to establish an Executive subcommittee. There is no need to duplicate that, and I believe that the new

economic strategy should inform and influence the next Programme for Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: That is why I want that to be significantly developed, if not completed, by the end of the calendar year.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank Members for their contributions. People outside the Chamber, particularly at this crucial time, will be reassured by the commitment from all parties. I welcome the Minister's statement. Clearly, the motion may have triggered a more proactive approach by the Executive in the setting up of a subgroup of ministerial colleagues. We look forward to the output of that group.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Member is wrong to say that, bearing in mind that I tabled a paper to the Executive some time ago. It is wrong to say that nothing has been happening. Things have been happening, and that paper went before the Executive on 15 April.

Mr P Ramsey: Good minds think alike. I am sure that the Minister concurs.

We look forward to new announcements from the Minister, particularly around the green energy jobs and the key announcements that she has to make. I know that the Minister is active, and I am aware of the hard work that she does in my constituency, particularly with tourism and the Walled City signature project. We look forward to more co-operation on such projects.

In proposing the motion, Alasdair passionately raised the concerns of all in the community and particularly those of young people. Their sense of responsibility, confidence, self-esteem, morale and motivation are being hit hard. He highlighted the good and well-informed reports and how we can bring it all together. That was the theme of the motion. Alasdair was clear about the need to promote STEM subjects and ensure that there are more university places for young people to prevent the brain drain and the loss of our young people to other economies. Alasdair openly and exclusively brought together the themes of the motion.

Jonathan Bell welcomed the important motion. He spoke aggressively about Cameron and

job losses. I support what Jonathan Bell said; we all do. We talk about protecting existing private sector jobs but, as he said, we have to retain and protect public service jobs as well. We welcome the £5 million that has been committed to the accelerated fund that he referred to.

Mitchel McLaughlin supported the motion and referred to a document from the Economic Reform Group by George Quigley. He said that stopping the decline in public service jobs was crucial. He said that coming out of conflict is a difficult period. He was the first Member to mention the importance of a reduction in corporation tax, an idea that is gaining momentum. He also mentioned the action point and the ministerial task team that is needed to bring that forward.

Lesley Cree is the only member of the Ulster Unionist Party still here today, and he has been taking a bit of flak from different parties about that. He referred to the 53,000 unemployed people in Northern Ireland. He rightly said that we need an active approach towards a job strategy and that we must take into account the co-ordination of all the reports to bring a new direction to that strategy. He is supportive of public services, which, he said, are vital.

Sean Neeson, who is no longer present, spoke about Harland and Wolff doing well with its green turbines. He welcomed the motion and talked about having a job strategy as soon as possible. Simon Hamilton said that creating jobs was not just about growing the economy. He was the first Member to talk about targeting social need to give confidence back to so many long-term unemployed. He also referred to procurement and its importance to businesses in Northern Ireland.

Jennifer McCann was the first Member to acknowledge the valuable contribution that the social economy makes across Northern Ireland in regenerating local communities. That is important, and I welcome that in my constituency. She said that we must be guided by strategies and reports and tie them all together. Taking people out of poverty was one of the key themes of Jennifer's comments.

Peter Weir said that no issue is more pressing to communities in Northern Ireland than unemployment. We all agree on that. The focus was on the private sector, and Peter, too, was Cameron-bashing. He said that the economy is

at the heart of the Programme for Government, and he was the first to let us know that the Executive have set up a new subgroup.

2.15 pm

Conall McDevitt said that the economy needs to be put at the heart of our regional government. He acknowledged the importance of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's commitment. However, he made a clear point — one which the SDLP has made continually — about the need to review budgetary constraints and stimulate the economy through the introduction of a different budgetary framework. He also said that the region needs to be developed to make it more attractive to foreign direct investment. He also spoke about the capital value of the social economy.

Daithí McKay, who is not in the Chamber at present, spoke in favour of the motion and of a change in the rate of corporation tax. He talked about research and development, the green economy and green jobs. There have been 1,000 construction jobs lost in his constituency. No constituency can sustain that level of job losses. He also spoke about regional imbalances.

Gerry McHugh talked about investment in infrastructure, particularly in roads, which in itself could create a good economy. He talked about the need for an all-Ireland focus, about bringing both Governments together to create a jobs strategy, and about the importance of all Departments working on such a strategy.

Minister Foster spoke at length about what she is doing. I acknowledge her work, and we look forward to further co-operation. We need to invest in jobs now and in sustained economic development for the future. Leslie Cree talked about DETI's April 2010 labour market report, which states:

"The working age economic inactivity rate for NI stands at 27.2 . This is significantly higher than the UK average rate (21.5) and is the highest of the twelve UK regions."

That statistics bulletin put the unemployment figure at almost 300,000.

During a recession, as Alasdair pointed out, the job situation is particularly bleak for young people. Almost 32% of those claiming jobseeker's allowance are under 25 years of age. Given that that is the case, we must

ensure that every opportunity is taken to use public procurement and investment to provide as many jobs as possible, thereby building our regional infrastructure. Such a policy provides jobs and training to unemployed people, without causing local inflation. That is why the SDLP has been arguing long and hard for investment in, for example, public housing.

At the same time as protecting employment now, we need to invest in our long-term economic competitiveness. There is general recognition that public sector employment sustains the Northern Ireland economy, with too few private sector jobs in fields in which there are high levels of innovation and export. That is reflected in poor GDP and low gross value added per capita relative to the Republic of Ireland and Britain, and that problem pre-dates the recession.

Some Members made the point that we need good, high-value jobs to come here. We have not built an economic system that has allowed us to compete effectively enough in high value-added industry. That has led to high levels of long-term unemployment and low levels of economic participation. We need to invest in and engineer an economic system that will provide sustained regional competitive advantage and high value-added industry.

On the supply side, we need to invest more in our people and our industrial product. Our economic system must be more export-focused, based on high levels of education and skills and focused on areas that target the economy at all levels, with a determined investment strategy in education. Most Members would agree that that is one of the key issues. We should invest sufficiently in higher education to stop the brain drain of 12,000 students going to university in Britain or elsewhere, which many Members mentioned. If students and families are prepared to invest in themselves, our Executive should step up to the plate and invest in them.

To ensure that everyone can participate in the new economy, we need to break the demoralising annual cycle of moving from jobseeker's allowance to low-level training for the thousands who are unemployed. We need to look at training provision for unemployed people and ensure that courses are offered that will make a real difference through sustained education and training.

Of course, many people with low job skills were lost in the school system and emerged with no qualifications, not even in mathematics and English. We have had several debates on this topic over the past two years. We need consensus on the way forward in this sector, particularly on education and the developmental needs of our children, rather than on the needs of the system. We must ensure that every child's schooling is a good schooling.

The independent review of economic policy details a range of initiatives that would improve the performance of the various DEL and DETI delivery agencies by reducing bureaucracy, artificial barriers and duplication of effort so that we can deliver better for all our businesses and respond with greater efficiency to investors.

I thank all Members for their support and welcome the opportunity that the subcommittee, which is now set up, presents.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

"That this Assembly recognises the continued significant impact of job losses across Northern Ireland; notes the need for strategic cross-departmental planning on job protection and creation; and calls for the establishment of a ministerial committee to consider the development, co-ordination and implementation of the recommendations of the independent review of economic policy, the independent review of policy on the location of public sector jobs, the report on the inquiry into public procurement and the report of the MATRIX panel, in order to develop a jobs strategy for the region by September 2010."

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business on the Order Paper is Question Time. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.21 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Spending Cuts

1. **Mr Beggs** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what protocols have been put in place to prioritise government programmes that have suffered from spending cutbacks which inhibit the achievement of preset targets. (AQO 1091/10)

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): The Executive are conscious of the difficult financial conditions that everyone has to manage in the current economic climate. Government are not exempt, and we recognise that it is more important than ever that we redouble our efforts to meet the challenging targets in our Programme for Government.

On 12 April 2010, the Executive approved revised departmental spending plans for 2010-11 to reflect the changing circumstances and pressures that Departments face. As the new plans have only just been approved, it is too early to report with any degree of accuracy how they have impacted on the delivery of targets. However, I emphasise that although the funding that is available to individual spending programmes is a matter for the respective Ministers, all Departments are fully aware of how important and necessary the step is. They recognise the importance of continuing to work towards meeting the targets that were set out in the Programme for Government to enable us to drive progress and, if necessary, make proactive interventions.

Last year, the Executive put in place a comprehensive monitoring and reporting framework, a key element of which is the preparation of delivery reports that set out an overview of progress against Programme for Government targets. Successive delivery reports will allow us to identify where targets are off

trajectory, where remedial action is required and the extent to which financial pressure has impacted on delivery.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Roy Beggs for a supplementary question, I remind the House that I normally give advance notice of questions that have been withdrawn. Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Mr Beggs: Does the First Minister acknowledge that if funding issues are not addressed at an early stage — for instance, by limiting new recruitment into the Civil Service — major issues such as redeployment, which is being discussed in the Planning Service, may arise? Does he agree that it would have been much better to have addressed the £8 million overspend by the Planning Service at an earlier stage and to have limited the new recruitment —

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to his question.

Mr Beggs: — at that earlier stage?

The First Minister: It is brave of the Member to turn up and not withdraw his question, given the mess of the Ulster Unionist Party in relation to spending plans. However, it is even braver of him to talk about the need for early alert and intervention in respect of spending cuts when his party proposes £200 million of spending cuts in Northern Ireland, not at the beginning of a financial year when preparations could be made for efficiencies to ensure that front line services are not hit but at the end of the process of determining spending proposals. He should learn from his advice and ensure that we do not have cuts to our spending programmes after the financial year has started.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: In light of the Conservative Party pledge to target Northern Ireland for public sector cuts, what does the First Minister suggest that we do now to ensure that we protect public services in Northern Ireland?

The First Minister: My Rt Hon friend rightly draws attention to the second factor. We face the issue of a substantial cut in public spending after we have approved our spending plans. Therefore, that cut will go directly to jobs and services. In fact, about 2,000 jobs in Northern Ireland will probably be lost. That is the kind of impact about which we are talking.

Beyond that, we are told that Northern Ireland is to be the number one target of a Tory

Administration, which is worrying. As regards the number of public sector jobs in relation to the size of our population, statistics show that there is not a great deal of difference between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Speaking as First Minister, I cannot give the real advice about what people should do, but the Rt Hon gentleman knows what people should do in these circumstances.

Mrs Long: I share the concerns that the First Minister has been expressing about people's plans. Given the unseemly haste with which the current Leader of the Opposition singled out Northern Ireland as a target for cuts, and given that other regions, such as Wales, are in the same position but were not singled out, what does the First Minister read into those comments for the future delivery of services, should we be so unfortunate as to inherit a Conservative Government?

The First Minister: At an earlier stage of his career, the former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party David Trimble indicated that the sort of influence that a regional group of Tories might have on overall Tory thinking would be somewhere between minimal and non-existent. We have seen that proved, and it probably indicates that the Conservative Party leader does not expect to pick up too many seats in Northern Ireland.

Mr McDevitt: Mr Speaker, you will be glad to hear that, for a change, I am going to ask the First Minister about something that he has some responsibility for.

Will the First Minister tell us when the office that he is the joint holder of will allow the funding decision for the emergency services college to come to the Executive? When will the House hear the good news, which is of concern to the Policing Board and the Northern Ireland public, that the inability to fund the new emergency services college has been dealt with and we are now able to make progress on the matter?

Mr Speaker: The Member knows that supplementary questions must, as far as possible, relate to the original question. The Member's question is outside the scope of the original question, so the First Minister may decide whether he wishes to answer it.

The First Minister: I am sure that the Member was attempting to show the impact that public expenditure has on jobs in the Cookstown area.

We all recognise that the proposal is first class, and in our negotiations with the Prime Minister, when we got an extra £800 million for policing and justice, the deputy First Minister and I argued to ensure that we would have funding for the project. Therefore, from the police's point of view, funding exists and is available. We are waiting to see whether those who are responsible for other elements of the proposal, including the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, are prepared to join in on the project.

Mr Speaker: Question No 2 has been withdrawn.

Strategic Investment Board: Chief Executive

3. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they will ensure that the salary level for the new chief executive of the Strategic Investment Board is appropriate in the current economic climate. (AQO 1093/10)

The First Minister: The chief executive of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) will stand down at the end of the month, and the board has launched a recruitment process for a new chief executive. The Strategic Investment Board fulfils a vital role in developing the Executive's investment strategy and in helping Departments to deliver key infrastructure projects. Therefore, the role of the chief executive of SIB is an important position that must be filled by a suitably qualified candidate. We have considered carefully and agreed with SIB the specification for the role, and we are giving consideration to the appropriate level of remuneration, which requires our approval.

The SIB is one of a small number of public bodies where senior positions require people with skills and experience who may have to be recruited from the private sector. That has implications for the level of salary that is appropriate. However, the economic climate has changed significantly since 2004, which was when the present chief executive was recruited. In addition, the Executive have taken a robust line on the payment of bonuses in the public sector. When reaching our decision on remuneration for the SIB's new chief executive, we will take those factors fully into account.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Although I accept many of the issues

that the First Minister raised, will he accept that, as he said, given the new economic climate in which we are governing, public sector pay and the pay of those who work for the public should also reflect the downturn in the economy?

The First Minister: Yes, and I think that I said that in my comments. The economy is different to what it was in 2004, which is when we began to look at that position. Furthermore, since then, the Executive have taken some decisions, particularly about bonuses. To ensure that the public get value for money and that, at the same time, we get the person with the right experience to do the job, all those decisions will have to be taken into account.

Lord Browne: Given the role that SIB plays in co-ordinating infrastructure development, does the First Minister agree that it has a key part to play in Northern Ireland's recovery from recession? Furthermore, does he agree that although pay should be sensitive to the current economic situation, we must ensure that we can attract a suitable candidate to fill that important post so that we can build Northern Ireland's recovery through investment for the future in schools, hospitals and roads, rather than slash the budget by £200 million, as proposed by the Conservatives?

The First Minister: The Member almost answers the question in the terms in which he offers it. I pay tribute to David Gavaghan. He created the role around himself, and everyone will recognise that it has been difficult, over the past number of years, in the mouth of a recession, to move forward in the way that he has. In many ways, we recognise that the construction industry, in particular, was under heavy pressure during the recession and that it was vital that public sector projects continued. As the Member indicated, there is a real danger that those projects will not continue if there is a massive slashing of public expenditure before we have full economic recovery.

Mr B McCrea: Given his earlier comments, will the First Minister extrapolate on the changing circumstances relating to pay and conditions? Is it time for a complete review of all public sector payments, or will a review cover senior staff pay only?

The First Minister: One must recognise that most of the salaries and payments to public sector workers result from negotiations at a national level. We looked at that at a recent Executive meeting, and, in general terms,

everybody recognised that there has to be that restraint. We also recognise that we have very limited controls. Indeed, if we were to act only on payments over which we have control, there would be significant disparities among people who do the same kind of jobs.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

4. **Mr P Maskey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether recent media reports accurately reflect the Executive's proposals for resolving the Presbyterian Mutual Society issue. (AQO 1094/10)

The First Minister: Recently, there has been considerable public commentary and media reporting on developments relating to the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS) issue. We very much welcome the meeting of the Presbyterian Church's special general assembly on 13 April, which endorsed a proposal that the Church should make a contribution to the hardship fund designed to help PMS members. The hardship fund is one element of a package of measures to support PMS members, which the deputy First Minister and I put to Gordon Brown on 24 March. He has replied to us, recognising the importance of continuing our work to resolve the PMS crisis and the need to finalise the way forward urgently, once the general election is concluded.

At their meeting on 16 April, the Executive agreed, in principle, the key features of the PMS support package. They include the provision of loans to a hardship fund and to the administrator to facilitate the orderly run down of the PMS over a period of seven to 10 years. With the inclusion of a contribution from the Presbyterian Church, we should be able to establish a hardship fund of at least £51 million to provide financial relief to Presbyterian Mutual Society members who are facing financial difficulties. That fund will be targeted mainly at small savers. It is anticipated that it will be administered by a panel, which will consider applications from Presbyterian Mutual Society members and award payments based on individual circumstances.

The full package of measures will also include the provision of a loan of up to £175 million to the Presbyterian Mutual Society administrator to allow him to run down the society's affairs over a period and to prevent him from having to

act as a distressed seller of PMS property in a deflated market.

Repayment of the loan and its interest will be met by the rental revenues received from PMS properties, other incomes and the sale of property that is owned by the Presbyterian Mutual Society as the market improves. The loan facility will be financed by the Executive drawing down an additional £175 million through a one-off increase in the reinvestment and reform initiative borrowing facility. Beyond the support of the Assembly and the Executive, that proposal will need the support of the Treasury and the Prime Minister if it is to be implemented. It must also be tested against state aid rules and cleared through the European Commission. However, I can assure the Assembly and PMS members that we will do all that we can to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

2.45 pm

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the First Minister for his reply. Can he assure the House that the proposals with regard to PMS savers will not mean that those who have additional savings will receive an extra percentage of annual interest on top of their deposits as has been suggested in recent media reports?

The First Minister: There has been a fair bit of conjecture about the proposal in some sections of the media. The reason for the vagueness of what we have said thus far is that we await the Treasury's approval of it.

The deputy First Minister and I have met the Prime Minister and spoken to him on the telephone on a number of occasions. He has indicated that the steps that can be taken during the purdah period are that the Executive could agree in principle to the proposals and that he would have his officials move to try to clear state aid issues. The issue would be one of the first items on the desks of the new Prime Minister and Chancellor as soon as the new Government are formed.

I hope that those outstanding issues can be cleared. Certainly, the Executive supported unanimously the proposal that was put to them by the deputy First Minister and me. That hurdle has been cleared. The next hurdle is to get the approval of the European Community and then the Prime Minister and the Chancellor.

Mr Bell: I thank the First Minister for his quiet industry and the efficiency with which he has handled the situation. Does he understand, however, that in my constituency of Strangford, retired people who do not have a great deal of time need that money desperately? Can he tell the House when he hopes that the matter will be resolved finally?

The First Minister: There are probably Members right around the House who will have had constituents come to them about the hardship that they face as a result of the PMS crisis. Certainly, I have been approached by many retired people who cannot access their savings and people who are distressed because they require funding for their own care and cannot access their assets. Therefore, the matter requires urgent attention.

Regrettably, however, the matter is outside the Administration's control. Indeed, we must be honest and indicate that we felt that we should not have needed to come to the rescue to deal with the situation, but that it should have been dealt with by the national Government. In the absence of that, we have put forward our own package rather than see savers, particularly small savers, suffer further.

The matter requires action from the European Union and the new Administration at Westminster. Until the election is over and a new Government are in place, the decision cannot be taken.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the First Minister for his detailed response. Obviously, one welcomes progress in that respect and looks forward to the final package. However, many people saw the way out as being a bank's taking over of PMS. Does the proposal that the First Minister has detailed to the Assembly preclude that solution to the problems that beset PMS, or does he still consider it to be a possibility?

The First Minister: I think that all of us felt that a commercial solution whereby a bank would take over responsibility for PMS's debt and assets would have been the best way forward. A number of banks looked at that. One or two even got to the stage of due diligence. However, none of them went beyond that. That does not preclude the possibility that a bank could have second thoughts on the matter. I am sure that the administrator would be very willing to speak to it.

However, had we left it at that and not put forward an alternative, the worst of all options would have occurred, and some of the larger lenders in the PMS would have gone to court. The administrator would then have been forced to hold a fire sale of assets, and the small savers would have been left without any funding. In the absence of a commercial solution, this is the best option available. However, should a commercial solution become a possibility, I am sure that the administrator will want to explore it.

Mr Speaker: Mr McCartney is not in his place for question 5.

Community Relations: East Londonderry

6. **Mr McQuillan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what funding has been allocated to community relations projects in the East Londonderry constituency over the last three years. (AQO 1096/10)

The First Minister: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Robin Newton to answer that question.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question, which is important, particularly as we move further into the year. The past three years have seen significant progress in improved relationships, with historic low levels of violence and tension. We want to ensure that improved relationships in the whole community continue and we want to address the challenges that face new and host communities. Funding for the promotion of community relations and good race relations has increased by one third from £21 million in the previous comprehensive spending review period to almost £30 million in the current 2008-2011 period.

A key element of the investment proposals is a significant increase over that period in the promotion of inclusion and integration at local level. The constituency of East Londonderry straddles three district council areas: Limavady Borough Council, Coleraine Borough Council and the Claudy and Banagher wards of Derry City Council. Community relations projects in the East Londonderry area received funding from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) via the district council community relations programme or the

Community Relations Council's programme of grant aid. As the Member requested information relating to the past three years, I have provided that in written format and placed a copy in the Assembly Library.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the junior Minister for that answer. Will he tell the House whether he has received any feedback on the impact of the funding on the East Londonderry constituency?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): All of us want to ensure that we get a return from such a substantial investment. I say, with some degree of satisfaction, that the good relations indicators show that we are receiving such a return. Improvements have occurred in certain areas: for example, there has been a 68% decrease from a 2005 baseline of 174 casualties from paramilitary-style shootings and assaults to 56 in 2008.

Although there was little change in the number of sectarian incidents from 2007-08 to 2008-09, crimes of that nature fell by 4%. Since 2005-06, sectarian crimes have been reduced by almost one third or, to be precise, 31%. In 2008, 65% of people believed that relations between Protestants and Catholics were better than they had been five years earlier. That figure is the same as it was in 2007 and maintains the highest ever level since recording began in 1989. Many other indicators are available, and I am happy to forward those to the Member in the form of a written submission, if that is of interest to him, in addition to the information that has already been provided.

Ms Lo: It is community relations week in Northern Ireland, and yet we have just heard from the Minister of Education that there will be drastic cuts in the community relations programmes in schools and the Youth Service, as well as in the core funding for 26 community relations organisations. Will the junior Minister assure the House that those cuts will not impact negatively on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for her question. I was also concerned as I listened to the comments being made in the media this morning, which was the first time that I heard about the line that the Minister of Education is preparing to take.

We all realise that investment in our youth and our schools is important, not just for the

short term but for the longer term. From our side, the cuts to the Youth Service budget that the Minister of Education has announced will not impact on the OFMDFM funding. In 2009, the funding of summer youth programmes, particularly the intervention projects, included £400,000 from OFMDFM to the Department of Education and £100,000 to the North Belfast Community Action Unit. A final decision has not been taken on this year's funding allocation for summer intervention programmes. However, there is no intention from our side to reduce any funding to that important area of work.

Mr McKay: Given that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister previously funded work to promote good relations between people of different sexual orientation in areas including east Derry, what steps is the Department taking to continue and build upon that good work?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): The answer is very simple and straightforward: I am not aware of any differences in the funding that we are putting towards that type of work.

Mr Speaker: The Member is not in his place to ask question 7.

Parades

8. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their proposals on the abolition of the Parades Commission and the creation of new structures to oversee parading. (AQO 1098/10)

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Speaker. Ceist uimhir a hocht.

The First Minister: Sorry, what was that? I did not catch that.

Mr Speaker: Order. Whatever language a Member wants to speak in is not an issue for the House, but the Member must then translate it into English.

Mr McGlone: Question 8. Ceist uimhir a hocht.

The First Minister: Consultation on the draft public assemblies, parades and protests Bill (Northern Ireland) began on 20 April and will run for 12 weeks until 14 July. The draft Bill details the proposals for the future handling of all issues relating to public assemblies, including parades and protests, and the new structures

that will be created. The deputy First Minister and I look forward to hearing the views of all stakeholders on the draft proposals.

Mr McGlone: Thank you, Minister. Go raibh maith agat a Aire. Will those proposals protect the rights of residents to not have provocative parades march through areas where they are clearly not wanted?

The First Minister: The proposals set out a framework within which any disputes can be resolved. If it is not possible to resolve them, it provides for an adjudication process. However, the emphasis that the deputy First Minister and I have put in the strategy is to encourage resolution, respect for each other's traditions and tolerance of the various cultural expressions that are manifest in our Province. Of course, there should not be any sectarian harassment, either to residents or to those on parade.

Dr Farry: Does the First Minister agree that the disputes around parades are a reflection of the continued divisions in our society and that any new legislation on parades should be complemented by a strategy on community relations? It is not just an issue about balancing rights; it is about how we build good relations in communities.

The First Minister: I will not quibble with what the Member has indicated. Not only is that the right way to go forward generally, it is the specific way that we have gone forward. Along with our proposal on how to deal with public assemblies, parades and protests, we have our CSI strategy moving through the system. It is the right way to move forward, and there needs to be a greater understanding and appreciation of the cultural differences in our society and greater respect of and tolerance for them.

3.00 pm

Justice

Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737

1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to repeal the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737. (AQO 1106/10)

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): The Act to which the Member refers is the subject of legal

proceedings. We expect that the judgement of the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal will be made shortly. In the meantime, when a party to legal proceedings is unable to speak English, he or she is able to use their own language in court with the services of an interpreter. More generally, the Assembly knows that language is a cross-cutting issue on which policy needs to be agreed by the Executive. I will wish to discuss that matter with ministerial colleagues following the court judgement.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the Minister to the House for his first Question Time, and I wish him well in all the responsibilities that he is undertaking.

Notwithstanding the fact that court proceedings are taking place and have to run their course, will the Minister say whether he is willing to consider legislating on the matter as part of the miscellaneous provisions Bill that he is determined to bring forward during the lifetime of the current Assembly? It would be remiss of the Assembly not to take the opportunity of such a Bill to correct the serious anomaly and inequity that remains in existing legislation.

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for his good wishes and the genuine way in which he and other members of his party have co-operated with me in recent days. Nonetheless, I fear that, in the context of the need for the Executive to agree an overall strategy for Irish and Ulster Scots, it would be inappropriate, particularly in the absence of any consultation, to promise any speedy action by my Department on a single piece of legislation that might come forward shortly.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister to the House in his new position. I find it extraordinary that ethnic minority languages are accommodated in the judicial system and the Irish language is not, given the demand for that indigenous language. More generally, what will the Minister do to ensure that the Irish language and Irish speakers are not discriminated against in the courts? Will he also look at the many symbols and emblems in the courts, with a mind to making courts more politically neutral places?

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for his good wishes. I hope that I do not have to precede every response by saying that today.

The Member needs to be aware that anyone who is an Irish speaker and solely an Irish speaker is

treated by the courts in exactly the same way as anyone who speaks only a different language. However, the Member raises a real issue, and the Executive as a whole must develop a collective strategy for languages, as his party and others negotiated at St Andrews. It is not possible for the Department of Justice to take forward that matter at this stage.

With regard to the slightly extraneous issue of the symbolism of the courts, that matter is kept under review by my Department in the context of its equality obligations, and I have no doubt that it will continue to be so considered.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 and question 8 have been withdrawn.

Security

2. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the present security situation. (AQO 1107/10)

3. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with party leaders regarding the threat from dissident republicans. (AQO 1108/10)

12. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable regarding resources to combat the threat from dissident republicans. (AQO 1117/10)

14. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the director and co-ordinator of intelligence for Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State and the Ministry of Defence. (AQO 1119/10)

The Minister of Justice: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 2, 3, 12 and 14 together, although I am not sure whether all the Members who have asked those questions are currently in the House.

All Members will join me in condemning unreservedly those who were responsible for Friday's bomb in Newtownhamilton. They want to undermine the political process and drag Northern Ireland back to the dark days of the past. We must all stand together to ensure that they do not succeed.

Since becoming Minister, I have received a full security briefing from Paul Goggins, the Security Service and the Chief Constable, as well as reviewing cross-border security co-operation

with Dermot Ahern, the Chief Constable and the Garda Commissioner. From the briefings that I have received, and from the latest published Independent Monitoring Commission report, it is clear that the threat level across Northern Ireland remains severe. There have been 10 terrorist attacks to date this year and, as recent events at Newtownhamilton police station and Palace Barracks in Holywood highlight, there remain small but dangerous groups who are intent on dragging Northern Ireland back to the past. I am committed to working with all who have operational responsibility for countering terrorism, with the Executive and with the wider community to ensure that they do not succeed.

Turning to the issue of resources, I have discussed with the Chief Constable the resources that he needs to combat the threat, and he has outlined the compelling case that he has submitted for additional funding for this year, 2010-11. I have also been assured that NIO Ministers have made that case to the Treasury, and I will be meeting the Secretary of State tomorrow to follow it up. I fully support the case that the Chief Constable has made.

I have not yet met party leaders to discuss security, nor have I held discussions with the MOD.

Lord Morrow: I also welcome Mr Ford to his first Question Time as the Minister of Justice, and I recognise that the long answer that he gave was an attempt to answer four questions in one. Does the Minister accept that the present security policy is not working and that it is vital that the latest round of terrorism not be allowed to get a hold as it did during the past 35 years through pandering to terrorists? Does he agree that the only way forward is to take the terrorists on and defeat them?

The Minister of Justice: No, I do not agree with the Member, although I thank him for his welcome, which is the same welcome that he gave me when I appeared before the Committee for Justice last week. I do not agree that the present security policy is not working. The Police Service and other agencies are striking a balance between fulfilling their security responsibilities and ensuring that they maintain community policing — that has been one of the major successes of recent years — across every part of Northern Ireland. The task requires resources to deal with the direct security threat and to build community links.

It is essential that politicians, the community, the police and other responsible agencies act together to ensure that we counter the threat and move forward together to build new structures in every part of Northern Ireland's governance. There is no doubt that the dissidents are trying to kill police officers and to damage relations between the police and the community. I am determined that they will not succeed in either aim, and I am sure that Members will support me in that.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for incorporating question 3 in his answer, and I wish him well in the onerous task that he has undertaken. When does the Minister envisage holding a meeting with party leaders on his Department and its workings?

The Minister of Justice: I thank Mr Gardiner for his good wishes and his supplementary question. I have met some Ministers and will, no doubt, meet others at the Executive meeting this week, at which we will consider issues that will impinge on my Department. At present, I have no formal arrangements to meet the party leaders; however, if party leaders wish to meet me, I will be happy to facilitate them.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree with me that the way forward is not the old rhetoric of the past and neither is it what those people are doing on our streets, whether in Newtownhamilton or at Palace Barracks? Politics is the way forward, and it is for us politicians to ensure that politics rules supreme.

Does the Minister agree with me that the changes to policing must be allowed to continue and that we do not allow anyone —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr O'Dowd: I will. Whether through the actions of so-called dissidents or whether through politicians coming out with strong statements, we must not allow policing to go backwards. Politics and policing must move forward.

The Minister of Justice: I agree with the Member. It is vital that we build on the successes of policing in recent years and that the priority that the Chief Constable set for community policing continues. However, it is also important that we assist the police and provide them with the additional resources that they need to counter the threat from those who

wish to drag us back. There is an important job to be done in confronting terrorist actions directly and in ensuring the widest possible community co-operation. I will do all that I can to assist the Police Service in both respects.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is important that the focus on community-based policing is not lost, as that could increase dissident recruitment? Robust community policing, alongside the community and with the community, is the best protection that the police have from attacks and our best protection against further terrorist developments.

The Minister of Justice: I thank my colleague for her question. She is, of course, absolutely right: one of the successes, even in the current difficult circumstances, is how well community policing is being rolled out. The Chief Constable has referred to the number of officers that he is determined to get from behind desks into community policing and response policing. Undoubtedly, there have been major successes in many parts of Northern Ireland in that respect. I know that as a constituency MLA, and, last Friday, I was pleased to hear from senior officers in Newry about the successes that they are having. Even in parts of that district, where there have been particular difficulties with dissidents, a strong community policing role is being carried through. That is vitally important as we seek to build new structures and new co-operation.

Mr Speaker: Mr Armstrong, your question has been grouped with question 2. Do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Armstrong: Yes, I will. Will the Minister outline his policy on the prison estate, including the female unit at Hydebank?

The Minister of Justice: I am not entirely sure how to connect that question with the Member's initial question on the security situation. Elsewhere in Question Time, I will answer questions about aspects of the prison estate. Clearly, an issue on the prison estate needs to be addressed. A number of buildings are substandard and in need of renovation, but I suspect that Mr McQuillan will not wish me to go further at this stage.

Maghaberry Prison

5. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice what measures he is taking to ensure

that prisoners in Maghaberry prison are being treated in accordance with human rights legislation and that industrial action by prison staff is not impinging on visiting rights for legal representatives or family members.

(AQO 1110/10)

Mr McLaughlin: I am not quite sure whether that is the next question. My question is question 5. Does the Minister wish to take it?

The Minister of Justice: Yes, I am quite happy to take questions in the order that they are intended.

As Minister, I am committed, as is the Northern Ireland Prison Service, to ensuring that all prisoners are treated in accordance with human rights legislation. The action by the Prison Officers' Association (POA), to which the Member referred, ended on 9 April, since when the prisons have been operating normally. During the period of action by the POA, the governor of Maghaberry deployed staff from other parts of the prison to ensure that the adverse impact on family and legal visits was kept to a minimum. I am not aware that any prisoners were denied their statutory entitlement. Prisoners also continued to have access to mail and to telephones. Where individual visits were curtailed, staff have attempted to make up the shortfall subsequently. Indeed, Maghaberry prison was praised by inspectors in their most recent report for its support to families.

As Members will be aware, I indicated last Thursday my intention to establish a review of the prison regime, starting at Maghaberry, in line with commitments set out in the Hillsborough agreement on 5 February. I will provide further details to the House shortly, and the review will relate to all regimes across all prisons but will start at Maghaberry.

Mr McLaughlin: The Minister has anticipated my supplementary question. The Minister indicated his intention to conduct a review. Does he have a timeline for that review, and will the review examine the conditions of detention, the management of prisons and the oversight of all the prisons?

The Minister of Justice: Following on from the Hillsborough agreement, it is my intention that the part of the review that relates to Maghaberry will be completed by the autumn of 2010 and will then roll on to the other two

institutions. I am afraid that I cannot give the Member a timeline for those, but it is clear from the emphasis that was given in the Hillsborough agreement and from the comments that I and others made in the feed-in to Hillsborough that there are issues that need to be addressed. I have already informed the Committee for Justice and other Ministers of my intention to carry out that review and the draft terms of reference, and I will seek to advance the review as fast as possible.

Mr K Robinson: I add my best wishes to the Minister in his new position. Can I press him on the specific measures that he is pursuing on improving the prison regime for prisoners and prison staff at Maghaberry?

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for his good wishes. He can press, but the point of having a review is to ascertain the appropriate way to move forward. Therefore, it seems fairly inappropriate to set out details at the point at which I have asked the review to commence.

3.15 pm

Mr P Ramsey: I wish the Minister well. Will the Minister assure the House that he will take legal action against the Prison Officers' Association if it recommences its threat to withdraw goodwill?

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for his good wishes and his question. What was described by the POA as withdrawing goodwill — it appears to have been more a matter of unlawful industrial action — was ended because of a court agreement by the POA. There is no doubt that the Prison Service and I will have to continue to respond robustly should there be any suggestion of such a withdrawal. However, I am determined that, with devolution having happened since the ending of that withdrawal of goodwill, we will take the opportunity under the new institutions and arrangements to build a fresh start. I am fully aware of good work being done in parts of the prison estate by members of the Prison Officers' Association and other colleagues. I am determined that we will use that as the basis to go forward and not look backwards at the difficulties of previous industrial action.

DOJ Priorities

6. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his priorities for the next twelve months. (AQO 1111/10)

7. **Mr Bell** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his key priorities over the next twelve months. (AQO 1112/10)

The Minister of Justice: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 6 and 7 together. As I said earlier, security and resourcing have been a priority for the Department of Justice since I took office. On the wider front, I intend to bring a draft addendum to the Programme for Government to the Assembly for approval in line with paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Hillsborough agreement. That will set out my key priorities for the next 12 months. Although I do not wish to prejudice the content of that document, I want to ensure that we will have a safer community for everyone in building a shared future and an effective, fair and speedy justice system and in reducing offending and reoffending. I shared that vision with the Justice Committee when I met it last week.

One of the ways in which I intend to make that possible is through the creation of a justice Bill. Although the contents of such a Bill are not yet finalised and will have to be discussed with the Executive, I am considering creating crime reduction partnerships, building on the successes of community safety partnerships (CSPs) and district policing partnerships (DPPs) and bringing our law on violence and intimidation in sports grounds up to date.

The Bill will also, importantly, focus on victims. In line with paragraph 7 of the Hillsborough agreement, I will ensure that criminal justice agencies provide the highest standard of service possible to victims of crime. To that end, I have already had meetings at Laganside courts with Victim Support and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which provide services to witnesses, adults and children.

Other examples of priority areas for my Department include a reform of legal aid and tribunals as well as a review of prisons, which I have mentioned. As I said on 12 April, I want a Justice Department that is accountable to the people of Northern Ireland working in partnership with other members of the Executive.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister join me in sending sympathy to the family of Seamus Fox, who was murdered outside Woodbourne PSNI station last Thursday? I am glad that the Minister mentioned community safety in his answer, because that

is a key issue. I am sure that all Members have been approached on the issue of community safety in their constituency. Can the Minister ensure that there will be a proactive approach to community safety, given that that incident has led to more questions because the murder took place outside Woodbourne PSNI station? Can he ensure that community safety is properly resourced whether through crime reduction or community safety programmes?

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for her question. Of course, the murder of Mr Fox concerns us all, so I join her in expressing my sympathy. On the wider front relating to community safety, it is clear that there have been significant successes by the community safety partnerships, as they have worked until now; however, there has also been, particularly in some smaller districts, an ambiguity at times between the role of DPPs and CSPs with, in some cases, many of the same people discussing the same issues. That is why I welcome the consultation initiated by the NIO under Paul Goggins to look at the rationalisation of those partnerships. I believe there is a real opportunity to promote community safety by ensuring that all the relevant statutory agencies, together with the local voluntary and community sector, the councils, and the Police Service, are brought into a wider partnership that can work on the necessary measures — different measures in different districts — to enhance community safety. Clearly, that must be done alongside the district policing partnerships' accounting role in respect of the work of police in their districts.

I believe that there will be real benefits from bringing those bodies together. That is why I trust that there will be a positive response to the consultation. Such a response will enable the inclusion of that provision in the Bill, which I hope will come before the House this term. It is clear that there is an ongoing wider community safety role that the public, councils and all other statutory agencies must sign up to. That has not always been the position.

Mr Bell: I welcome the Minister as a professional colleague. I appreciate that he began his career when I was aged three.

Given the severity of the threat against the men and women of the Police Service, will the Minister join me in saluting their courage and that of the RUC George Cross before them? Will

he ensure that that those men and women, who face a severe threat in protecting all of us, will have all the resources that are necessary for their protection and safety?

The Minister of Justice: I thank my young colleague for his good wishes. In this corner of the Chamber, it was suggested that some people have aged worse than me; however, I shall not follow that any further.

The Member makes a serious point. Of course I am happy to pay tribute in the House, as I did in Committee last week, to the work of police officers in the PSNI and the RUC in upholding the law for the benefit of the entire community. I now wish to see the necessary resources provided so that the policing task of the Chief Constable and all his staff can be carried out to best effect in dealing with the imminent security threat, which we talked about earlier, and the wider long-term task of building partnerships with all the people of Northern Ireland so that we can promote community safety, which we just spoke about. In that context, I believe that the police will not be found wanting. I have seen significant enthusiasm for that new agenda in my Department and many of the agencies related to it. I trust that all Members will play their part in ensuring that the community acts along with the agencies in bringing that about.

Mr Kennedy: I, too, welcome Mr Ford to his first occasion at the Dispatch Box. I thank him for his earlier condemnation of the bombing incident in Newtownhamilton, which is in my constituency, last Thursday. Will he join me in congratulating local members of the Fire Service for all their important and necessary work that evening?

The Minister referred to his key priorities, including public confidence. The Minister will be aware that, in the aftermath of the Newtownhamilton incident, the local Presbyterian minister, Rev Kerr Graham, said that people in that area of south Armagh felt abandoned. What is the Minister's reaction to that statement? How does he intend to address the issue of resources, which affects public confidence so much?

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for his good wishes. He raises serious points about resourcing. I am not going to second-guess the Chief Constable's operational responsibility or the Policing Board's role. As I said earlier, if the Chief Constable wishes to make a case for additional resources and if that case is valid,

I will ensure that that is put to the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Finance and Personnel, both of which have relationships with the Treasury.

I am as concerned as the Member about the suggestion that people think that parts of Northern Ireland may have been abandoned. Let us be very clear: what happened last Thursday night was not the fault of the Chief Constable or any member of the Police Service. What happened last Thursday night was a terrorist attack by dissident republicans on the people of Newtownhamilton, members of the Police Service and the entire community. In that context, police officers on the ground must determine how to deploy resources, while ensuring their safety and that of the public. Given that members of the Fire Service were already on the ground, carrying out the necessary evacuation, it is clear that people were being protected as well as possible at that time. Clearly, the police face difficult issues in certain areas. However, those issues should be blamed on those who caused the problem, not on those who, unfortunately, have to respond on behalf of all of us.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Minister on his appointment; I have conveyed my congratulations to him privately.

A couple of issues are important to the community. The first issue is sentencing. Is it the Minister's intention in the none-too-distant future to conduct a review of sentencing? Secondly, the PPS deals with issues on the prosecution threshold that I am sure have already been conveyed to his Department.

The Minister of Justice: I am grateful to the Member for the good wishes. The issue of sentencing guidelines was part of my answer to a question that has been withdrawn. I will deal with that point elsewhere. However, guidelines apply on other parts of these islands, and we need to learn lessons from other sentencing guidelines councils to ensure that we introduce the best possible arrangements for sentencing that provide public confidence. Indeed, I raised that issue last week with the Lord Chief Justice.

The Member asked me to stray into discussing issues that relate to the Public Prosecution Service. I remind him that the PPS has no formal relationship with my Department and maintains its operational and professional independence.

Mr Speaker: Question 7 has been answered, and question 8 has been withdrawn.

Magilligan Prison

9. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline progress in relation to the new prison at Magilligan. (AQO 1114/10)

The Minister of Justice: I have serious concerns about the state of large parts of the accommodation and infrastructure at Magilligan prison, and, although I pay tribute to the work of the management and staff at the existing facility, I agree with the inspectors and the Prison Service that a prison to replace Magilligan is an urgent priority. I know that the comprehensive options appraisal that was published in December 2007 pointed to the advantages of rebuilding on the existing site. On that basis, the Prison Service appointed separate teams to take forward the business case, the design and the programme management. Since devolution, discussions have taken place between my Department and officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel. I look forward to receiving the outline business case, which is due for submission by the summer and will include an assessment of all the options.

Mr McQuillan: I welcome the Minister to the position of Justice Minister. After the loss of facilities such as Shackleton Barracks, does the Minister realise how important the facility at Magilligan prison is to the local economy?

The Minister of Justice: I am aware of the strong support of the Member and his party colleagues for the economic contribution of Magilligan. At the moment, under the Department of Finance and Personnel's guidelines, the Department of Justice must ensure that the business case that is ultimately adopted is the best possible and most robust business case for the location of the facility that will replace the somewhat out-of-date buildings at Magilligan. Until that business case is completed, I cannot give the Member any more assurance.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. How does the Minister intend to deliver a fit-for-purpose facility for women? Will he confirm to the House whether he has had conversations with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the

latter's responsibility for prisoners' healthcare, particularly for their mental health?

The Minister of Justice: I congratulate the Member on her creativity in working those two questions in. I am fully aware of the issues that have been in the public domain for some time concerning facilities for women prisoners, and I will keep the matter under review. Last week, one of my first acts as Minister was to visit Hydebank Wood, specifically Ash House, to see the facilities for women prisoners there. It is clear that Ash House is doing good work but that the physical layout of the site has created difficulties.

The Member asked whether I had met the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss mental health issues. I met him briefly, and a review is under way of the health services that the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provides to the Prison Service. Those services have now been in place for 18 months. Given my professional background, I have particular concerns about the mental health aspect, and I will report to the House on the review's outcome.

3.30 pm

Mr Leonard: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Tuesday, we did not have time to get to a listed question that was put to a Minister. Is it in order that I, the Member who asked the question, have still not got a reply all these working days later? I thought that there was a protocol that if we do not get to a particular question, the Member should be furnished with an answer on the same day. The Minister concerned, the Minister for Social Development, waxed lyrical about the great and grand achievements in South Down for a particular reason called an election. However, maybe the news about Dungiven and east Derry is not so good. Will you look into that to see whether I will, at last, be given a reply?

Mr Speaker: My understanding is that your question is being followed up. I will keep a watching brief on it.

Before we move on to the next item of business, I want to inform the House that during questions for oral answer to the Justice Minister, quite a number of Members wanted to ask supplementary questions to question 2. I must remind Members that question 2 was grouped with three other questions. Understandably,

Members whose questions have been grouped are called first to ask a supplementary question. Therefore, it is not easy to allow other supplementary questions.

Let me say to the whole House that I will not have Members who feel that they should have been allowed to ask a supplementary question come up to the Table and abuse the Clerk or the Speaker. Let me make it absolutely clear to every Member that I will not allow that to happen. All sides of the House get a fair balance when it comes to supplementary questions during Question Time.

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. It is not always easy to let every Member ask a supplementary question. Some Members feel that they should be allowed to ask a supplementary question because they stand up so often. However, I will not have Members coming to the Table and abusing the Clerks and, especially, the Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Funding for Army Cadets

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.

Mr Shannon: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the positive effects of the Army cadets on the young people who enlist, as well as the benefits to army enrolment; and calls on the Defence Secretary to ensure that the necessary funding is allocated to this organisation to ensure its continuance.

I urge the Assembly to support the motion. As an introduction, I will relay some information that I retrieved from the cadets' website. I have to say that, when reading it, I wanted to relive my youth and join the cadets because, unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to do that.

The Army Cadet Force is a youth organisation sponsored by the Army that provides challenging military, adventurous, sporting and community activities. It aims to inspire young people to achieve success in life with a spirit of service to the Queen, their country and their local community, and to develop in them the qualities that are required of a good citizen. It is important that we outline those qualities.

The aim is achieved by providing progressive cadet training, which is often of a challenging and exciting nature, to foster confidence, self-reliance, initiative, loyalty and a sense of service to other people. Those are qualities with which everyone would wish to be associated. The cadet force encourages the development of personal powers of practical leadership and the ability to work successfully as a member of a team, which is another tremendous quality. It stimulates an interest in the achievements, skills and values of the Army. It provides advice and prepares young people for a career in the services or the reserve forces.

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

The Army Cadet Force's motto is "to inspire to achieve". That is a very grand motto and one that we should all aim to achieve. Army Cadet

Force training aims to produce self-reliant and fit young people who have an understanding of basic military subjects, are initiated in the art of leadership, are aware of their responsibilities as citizens, and have a well-developed interest in the Army and the community. The Army Cadet Force is the Army's voluntary youth organisation, which is made up of young people between the ages of 12 and 18.

The cadet force has been successfully helping young people in their development for more than 125 years: the anniversary is this year. It is one of the country's leading youth organisations. As it is run along military-style guidelines, a certain amount of discipline is to be expected. Cadets follow a standard training syllabus — the army proficiency certificate — and many other courses and activities are also available to them. The syllabus training consists of four progressive levels. Training at each level consists of drill, skill at arms, map reading, field craft, shooting, first aid, physical training and citizenship training. Various additional courses are available to the cadets, depending on their interests and skills, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which is closely linked to the training syllabus and is also available through other organisations.

I was not surprised to learn that a new emerging crisis surrounds the Army Cadet Force. That is why the motion has been tabled. When I was contacted by the chairman of the Royal British Legion in Newtownards last October, I was horrified to learn that due to cutbacks in spending, the Royal Artillery would not be standing watch at the cenotaph in the town as they usually did. Thankfully, that did not happen after a barrage of complaints from MLAs, councillors and people on the street. After seeing what lengths attempts at cost-cutting were going to, I was not surprised when my colleague Jeffrey Donaldson spoke out amid concerns that the cadet organisation will collapse if a proposed stoppage in funding continues this year.

More than 3,000 youngsters in Northern Ireland are involved in the various branches of the cadets. Ulster has produced two of the past three UK cadets of the year. We have a proud history and an active service level that we must maintain. In my constituency of Strangford, there are four cadet forces — one each in Comber and Greyabbey, and two in Newtownards, at Regent House School for the Air Cadets and at the Movilla camp.

The organisation, which is due to celebrate its 150th anniversary this year, received around £60 million in funding from the Ministry of Defence (MOD), but after it was forced to find savings of £120 million last year, the cadets lost out. There is a pecking order, and the Labour Party must take responsibility for the recent crisis. Originally, the funding cut was to last from October 2009 to April 2010, but there is now a suggestion that the freeze will extend to October 2010. That must not be allowed to happen without a battle.

The cadets' funding goes towards two bases in Northern Ireland at Magilligan and Ballykinler, as well as paying the adult instructors for taking the cadets away for weekends. I know that more than one young man's life has been turned around through the skills learned and the discipline taught through the cadet programme. I have seen real, practical change in young people because they are in the cadets. I know of one young girl who joined the cadets and who has completed her second tour of duty in Afghanistan. She returned home last week after eight months of service, and her husband, who is also a serving soldier, returned home after his tour. They saw each other for the first time since January. That was hard on their marriage, but her family told me that she has no intention of leaving and will renew her contract.

That girl, along with many others, had their passion sparked and inflamed by being cadets. They are now in service to their Queen and country and are doing us proud on the field of battle in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the world. To dispose of the cadet service will have untold negative effects on recruitment and service in the Army, and it is essential that we keep it going.

Although the Government provided extra funding for the Territorial Army, they did not do so for the cadets, and a crisis will emerge if that situation is not resolved in the next month. Trainers who supervise children on weekends have agreed to continue doing so for six months without pay or reimbursement, but will not continue indefinitely. That is only equitable and fair. One cannot expect adult trainers to give up their time and commitment indefinitely without recompense.

There is a justified fear that if funding were to cease now, it would be very difficult to get the organisation going again when more money is available and the MOD realises how

essential that funding is to cadets' training. I believe that that may not happen at all. I understand that the MOD's current priority is overseas operations, and that money is tight. All Departments have to make efficiency savings, but it is clear that our boys and girls on the front line must come first. Measures are necessary to focus remaining resources on the main effort, yet I cannot help but think that the relatively small amount of funding that is needed to run the cadets is somewhere to be found in the Ministry of Defence budget. I ask Members to join me in asking the MOD to find that money to ensure the future of the cadet forces.

Young men and women benefit from the discipline that cadet training brings. We all benefit from the security provided by those who go on to be members of the British Army, Air Force or Navy. We are blessed with the best armed forces in the world. That does not come about through sheer luck. It comes through the institutions that train and work with our soldiers during their time as cadets, through recruitment and as fully fledged soldiers. If that proud history and superior service is to continue, it will happen only if the funding is provided. The Assembly owes a duty to our current and future cadets to stand up and ask for the appropriate commitment and dedication from the MOD and the Secretary of State for Defence, Bob Ainsworth.

I am aware of the funding cuts that may head our way if the Tories get into power. However, such cuts cannot halt our security measures. We should have no doubt about it: these boys and girls become the men and women who sacrifice all that they have for our security. We are grateful to them for what they do each and every day. Those cuts cannot extend to help not being given to such young people so that they can be instilled with confidence and discipline. Therefore, such cuts cannot be tolerated. The Assembly must stand up today for the development of thousands of young men and women from all social, economic and religious backgrounds.

I ask Members to put aside any preconceived notions that they have about what the cadets are and what they do. Members should realise that the cadets form disciplined, adjusted young people of good character and personality. That is what our Province needs.

I should have declared an interest at the beginning of my speech, and I apologise for

not doing so. I am Ards Borough Council's representative to the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for Northern Ireland.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i gcoinne an mholta seo, agus seo iad na fáthanna nach mbeidh Sinn Féin ag tabhairt tacaíochta don mholadh.

Let me state clearly that Sinn Féin does not support the motion. Although we accept the right of Members to bring to the Assembly issues that are of relevance to them and to those they represent, we certainly do not support the motion. An election is in the offing, so this may be a case of seeing who can wave the biggest Union flag. I have to be clear when I state that to republicans and nationalists, the history of the British Army, particularly in Ireland, has had no positive effect that I can see. Therefore, I do not support the motion.

Mr Shannon: As I said, I have represented the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for Northern Ireland on Ards Borough Council for 25 years. Therefore, the motion is not a matter of who waves the biggest Union flag; it is a matter of supporting that organisation as I and others in the Chamber have done consistently for 25 years.

Mr McCartney: I do not doubt the Member's integrity or honour, but the timing of the motion is very appropriate for the election and for flag-waving. Perhaps it represents a good opportunity for him in the election campaign, so I wish him good luck with that.

I live in Derry. Bloody Sunday is deep in the consciousness of the people of that city. Civil rights demonstrators marched peacefully on that day and were murdered on the streets. If that were not enough, the history of the British Army and the British Ministry of Defence since that day has been one not only of supporting murder but of cover-ups, denial and the destruction of evidence. All those elements run right through that history. The Member may feel that the British Army has support or has had some sort of positive effect in Ireland, but from a republican and nationalist perspective, nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr Bell: The Member used the word "denial". However, does he accept that the Provisional IRA denied to the families of the disappeared the dignity of where those bodies lay? Does he also accept that the Provisional IRA was

involved in torture, that it was involved in murder and that it was involved in booby-trapping the corpses of those whom it murdered?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask all Members to return to the subject of the debate.

Mr McCartney: I hope that I am sticking to the subject of the debate, which is about whether the British Army has a positive effect. That is what I am speaking to.

Bloody Sunday was not an isolated incident. The list of British Army murders in Ireland is extensive. It goes from Ballymurphy to Dunloy and from the Creggan in Derry to Coalisland. It goes right throughout the North and the island. Members should always remember that the British Parachute Regiment murdered two people on the Shankill Road. Those people were described at the time as Protestant, working-class people, and there was no —

Mr Shannon: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You know that I am not one for causing any bother — that is not the way that I do things. However, are the Member's comments relevant to the motion? The motion is about the cadet forces and about the young boys and girls who are being trained in the military for the RAF, the Navy and the Army. With respect, I think that the Member should focus on the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have asked Members to keep to the subject of the debate. I am quite certain that the issues that come into the debate are part and parcel of it, but I ask Members to focus on the debate.

Mr McCartney: Again, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I am not one to question your position on the matter, but the motion very clearly uses the words "positive effects". I am trying to point out that they do not have a positive effect. Therefore, Members may not wish to hear my contribution, and given their point of view, that may be understandable and fair enough. However, if they are going to tell us that the cadets, which clearly act as a recruiting sergeant for the British Army, have a positive effect, I am saying that they do not. I shall outline my reasons for that.

3.45 pm

The recent history of the North is one laced with murder, attempted murder, oppression and brutality. The British Army infiltrated and used unionist death squads. In case people think

that this is a nationalist and republican issue: in recent times, with the case of Raymond McCord Jnr, the British Army actively recruited people to kill Protestants, unionists and loyalists. This is not a sectional issue. The British Army has not had, and does not have, a positive effect here. The Member mentioned people going to Afghanistan, and there have been recent stories from Afghanistan, and, indeed, from Iraq, that resonate with people from the North: the exact same occupying Army, bringing with it the occupation Army's style, which has not had a positive effect.

I note the absence of the SDLP. Perhaps too many of them are away in Afghanistan on British Ministry of Defence-sponsored trips. However, it is a shame that they are not here to state their position. From a nationalist and republican perspective, I say again that there is no positive effect from the British Army's history in Ireland, and Sinn Féin will not be supporting the motion.

Mr Cree: Unfortunately, the behaviour of Northern Ireland youth does not very often reach the House for positive reasons. Young people throughout the United Kingdom get a very bad press, whether it is because of the perception of them in the local community or excessive demonising by the media.

I gladly welcome the debate, because the work of the cadet organisation plays a major role in changing attitudes and in developing young people. It is regrettable that what should be a motion about young people has degenerated into a political discussion about the role of the British Army. From my experience of serving in the forces, many people from the republican and nationalist tradition served with the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and the British Army for centuries, and continue to do so. However, the Army Cadet Force is not an organisation that recruits directly into the army. About 75% of cadet movement members adopt careers and professions in civilian service.

The cadet forces of all three services develop physical and mental skills in young people, encouraging self-confidence, teamwork, friendship and leadership. Cadets of all abilities and backgrounds are welcome to participate in activities and exercises that they would not have otherwise considered due to a lack of opportunity or confidence. There is a definite value in having well-rounded, community-minded, experienced young people who are ready to

assume their places as tomorrow's leaders and decision-makers.

The cadet movement also gives young adults a realistic view of military life through hands-on experience in a variety of career fields, while instilling strong values, positive character traits and an important sense of civic responsibility. Cadets are under no obligation to serve in the armed forces later. However, many have gone on to highly successful military and civilian careers, including myself.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party supports the motion. I have very little to add to what has been said, other than that the cadet services are a very important youth activity, and provide a good direction for all our young people, giving them a sense of community and responsibility towards wider society.

The cadet services can and do encourage our young people to pursue a career in the service of the country, and recruitment can be from the age of 16. By offering help and support, the service is steering our young people to live a good and positive life. In this day and age, when there are so many opportunities for young people to get into mischief and trouble, it is incumbent on the cadet services to provide excellent direction for our young people, which they do.

I am happy to support the motion.

Lord Browne: I support the motion, and I declare an interest as a member of the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association. The association, amongst other things, works to oversee the Army Cadet Force in Northern Ireland, so I know very well the good work that cadet forces can deliver for young people.

We are all aware that cadet forces can continue to provide that important opportunity to our young people only if it has the funding to do so. The issue of funding has been raised several times recently in the House of Lords. It is worth noting that while cadet forces across the United Kingdom have suffered cuts to their funding, cadet forces in Northern Ireland have been hit even harder than the detachments in Great Britain because of the much higher travel costs involved in attending the annual camps, events and training that take place in England and Scotland.

I remember, as a young cadet, being put in charge of transferring baggage from the ferry in Scotland

to the train on the way to the annual camp. Those were the days when the trains may have run on time, but the luggage went astray, and I regret to tell you that the kit ended up in Dundee, rather than in Lancashire, and I spent a week peeling potatoes. However, that is by the way.

The previous cut to the cadet budget took place last October and amounted to some £4 million. That forced the association to immediately cease providing paid training days. The officers and instructors who are volunteers have now to give even more of their free time, and, in many cases, they have to take unpaid leave from their civilian employment in order to attend the training camps, which are vital to the quality of the instruction delivered to cadets.

It is right that we pay tribute to the dedication shown by volunteers to the cadet forces and to the cadets themselves. Without those selfless volunteers, the cadet forces would simply be unable to function and their members would be unable to experience the many benefits that come from involvement.

The cadet forces play an important role for young people. They provide them with the opportunity to develop personal skills that will help them throughout their lives. Although the ethic of military discipline was — and still is — lost on me, it can have a positive impact on the lives of many young people by providing them with a structured environment in which to develop.

The cadet forces allow young people to gain leadership skills and encourage them to work together as part of a team, and through the BTEC and Duke of Edinburgh's Award programmes, cadets can gain qualifications that are equivalent to GCSEs. That is why they are important. Not only do cadet forces work to complement education in schools, they can help to catch the young people who fall through the gaps in the formal education system, give them real qualifications and equip them with the skills that they require for success in later life.

It is unfortunate that there is a perception that cadet forces operate only with children in private schools. However, in truth, only 9% of the cadet budget goes to detachments that are based at fee-paying schools. The vast majority of resources go to cadet groups that work at community level across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. That makes it vital that the cadet forces receive the money required to continue

delivering that resource to young people. That is why I support the motion.

Mr G Robinson: The Army Cadet Force today comprises:

"131,000 young people, led by 25,000 adult volunteers, in well over 3,000 sites across the country."

My quotation is from the Ministry of Defence, regarding all cadet services on 18 February 2010. It is a demonstration of the value of the cadets to our young people. I was highly impressed when, together with my colleague Gregory Campbell, I visited an excellent open day for the cadets and their families in Magilligan Training Centre in my East Londonderry constituency.

"To inspire to achieve" is the motto of the 47,000 Army Cadet Force members, and to fulfil that motto, the force's members are able to avail themselves of challenges that include community activities. This is of value to society as a whole and to local communities in particular. Another major benefit is the development of a young person's self confidence and esteem. That is done through helping young people to increase their physical fitness and to learn the skills required for teamwork and leadership. Those are positive skills for the cadet and society to have. Young people are our future, so equipping them with such skills is an important part of securing the future of the cadets and of society. Proper funding is essential to ensuring that that positive contribution continues.

The present funding for Army cadets amounts to less than 0.3% of the entire MOD budget, and even that is to be reduced. As was said earlier, the cadets are assisted by adult volunteers, so that money is used only to fund the activities. Therefore, for opportunities to continue to be offered, it is essential that funding be secured.

I want to point out that cadets are drawn from all backgrounds, which I welcome. There can be no accusations of religious bias — a remark that I direct across the Chamber. Nor are they expected to join the Army when their time as cadets is over — I again direct that across the Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to address his remarks through the Chair, not across the Chamber.

Mr G Robinson: I state again, Mr Deputy Speaker, that some cadets progress into serving their country, but doing so is not a requirement.

The nature of sea, Army or air cadets and their positive experience makes it vital to ensure that they are properly funded. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I support the motion.

Mr Bell: I thank Alderman Shannon for tabling the motion. Anyone who knows him knows his love for Strangford. He has served it for a quarter of a century and knows that the Army cadet movement has seen hundreds, if not thousands of children pass through its ranks. He knows how that benefits the people of Strangford, and he wants the best for them. That is why, after his distinguished record of 25 years serving the area, he has tabled the motion. Those who would diminish the reason for bringing the motion here are not looking at it correctly.

Why do we look at the benefits of Army cadetship? Let us take a second to realise what it can do for the development of our young people. Let us look at the intelligence quotient (IQ). We are told that one of the greatest problems in education today is that young people are not taught enough problem-solving skills. They are not taught enough about independent thinking. They are not taught enough about basic subjects to make progress in their careers. Aside from character, which my colleague from North Down Leslie Cree described so well, what does Army cadetship offer? Aside from discipline, Army cadet training offers key skills in problem-solving and logistics. Every subject area of the curriculum, from physics to geography, is taught, enhanced and supported by Army cadet membership.

Army cadetship offers more than the IQ: it offers the EQ — the emotional quotient. Industry tells us our young people need a strong EQ as well as a strong IQ. Industry wants young men and women who can work as part of a team; young men and women who can accept discipline; young men and women with a strategic focus and an ability to work to a plan; young men and women capable of independent thinking, but also capable of working as part of a corporate body. I can think of few organisations for young people other than the Army cadets that can give them all those skills, which can subsequently be put on a CV.

Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, the investment is not, as has been made out from across the

Chamber, in training young people for conflict, although we cannot shy away from the security needs that we may have in the future. People talk about Afghanistan, but is it correct that teachers in Afghanistan are murdered and tortured for teaching girls? Is that right? Is that something that the world should turn its back on and look away from?

Are those the standards that we want for the twenty-first century? Whether it is murdering teachers in Afghanistan or blowing 80-year-old women off their feet and causing criminal damage to public property in Newtownhamilton, there will be a need for security in the future.

4.00 pm

I shall take some time to respond to points that were made. The Member for Londonderry did not answer the question about the IRA's torture, which was in contravention of every Geneva convention. He did not answer the question about the IRA disappearing single mothers of 10. He did not answer the question —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I asked Members to return to the subject of the debate, and it was agreed that we should.

Mr Bell: I want to answer, Mr Deputy Speaker, because allegations were made during the debate. I want to highlight the distinguished role of the British Army, and I have no hesitation in doing so. Members should realise that the IRA murdered more Roman Catholics than the British Army did. Therefore, Members should not point their finger when three are pointing back at them.

The purpose of today's motion was to ensure future funding for our young people so that they have opportunities that, in many cases, their mothers and fathers, although genuinely loving them, do not have the resources to give them. That funding will give them opportunities to travel and see the world, learn new technologies and enhance their educational skills base. That is what the Army cadets do without any commitment to the future.

Mr Shannon: Businesses and organisations recognise the Duke of Edinburgh's award, which can be attained through the cadet forces, as an achievement. Does the Member agree that people can do more good inside the cadet forces than outside them?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr Bell: I agree entirely that any young person who passes through the Army Cadet Force will leave as a more rounded, better-educated and better-skilled young person than they would have been without the experience. Alderman Shannon knows only too well about the young people in my constituency who did not have the opportunities that many of us had but who, through the Army Cadet Force, were able to travel, learn new languages and skills and learn how to play their role as part of a team. Many young people are in a job today because they were able to present a CV that showed the skills that they acquired through the Army cadets.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Bell: I support the motion.

Lord Morrow: Some good things have come out of the debate. Unfortunately, some regrettable remarks were also made. However, I assure the House that the thrust of the motion was not to cause division or rancour. It is unfortunate that some decided to go down that road. If we brought a motion to the House on the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides or the Boys' Brigade, some Members would try to turn that into some sort of political debate. That is regrettable.

I was a member of a cadet force in my youth, so I speak from experience. Members will know by looking at me that it certainly did not discriminate against me because of my height or anything like that. No discrimination was ever practised in the Army Cadet Force, of which I was a member in Ballygawley. I have many happy memories of it. Many of the lads who went through the force at that time achieved many things.

Jim Shannon set out very well the role of the Army Cadet Force. He showed his full appreciation of what the Army Cadet Force has done. Unfortunately, Raymond McCartney took a different line. He thought that there was something very political about it. He thought that there was something very British Army about it, but I assure the House that many former cadets never served in the British Army or in any security forces, yet they are better citizens as a result of being in the cadets. Indeed, as a result of serving in the Ballygawley cadets in the 60s, I am a better citizen.

Unfortunately, some of the then leaders are deceased, but I pay tribute to them publicly. The endless hours that they sacrificed to train boys, including me, are much appreciated.

Leslie Cree spoke about the self-confidence that the Army cadets bring to young men and women. In my day, it was just young men; nowadays, it is both, and there is nothing wrong with that. Mr Cree was right: by giving young people a good start in life, the cadet force encourages self-confidence and ensures that they turn out to be better citizens. Kieran McCarthy's remarks were brief, but, again, they showed appreciation of the ACF, and his support is valued.

Lord Browne spoke enthusiastically about what the ACF is all about, and he relayed some of his experiences in it. I was going to claim that I was probably the only Member who was a former member of the Army Cadet Force, but I stood back because I am not sure that that is totally accurate. Members, present and absent, who were not in the cadet force do not know what they were missing. They should encourage their children and grandchildren to join the cadet force, because it would make them better and more rounded citizens.

George Robinson spoke in glowing terms, saying that he and his colleague Mr Campbell had witnessed at first hand the activities of the cadets in his area. He showed great appreciation for what cadets do and what they are trying to achieve in so many people's lives.

In his usual eloquent manner, Jonathan Bell outlined what the ACF is all about, and he concentrated on the thrust of the motion. I ask the House to reflect on exactly what the motion states. Unfortunately, people take perceptions into their head and think that that must be how things are. It is not that way. People may not agree with me about everything, but perhaps they will agree that the cadet force exists to help, encourage and support young people from all walks of life. There is no discrimination or elitism, which is an excellent standpoint that must be encouraged. I hope, therefore, that the House will not divide. On reflection, perhaps even those who expressed reservations about the cadet force will stop to think that the motion deserves the House's full support. Perhaps, at least, they will not attempt to divide the House on this important issue.

It may have been said, but it needs to be said again: this year, the Army Cadet Force

celebrates its 150th anniversary. As a former member of the cadets, I take great pride in speaking to the motion. I thought that I would never get the opportunity in my lifetime to speak in a public arena about the Army Cadet Force, so I do so with pride. I found it to be an excellent organisation, which instructed me on discipline, how to be a good citizen and how to look out for others and not to be self-centred. For me, the best part was the camaraderie; friendships that remain to this day were developed. Similarly, the valuable skills that are taught stay with one throughout one's life.

At present, across the United Kingdom, 47,000 teenage cadets are supported by 8,500 selfless adult workers. To service all those young men and women takes approximately 1,700 volunteers. Extra pressure is being put on volunteers in today's society, and Members will appreciate what I am saying. There is much red tape to go through to be a volunteer in any youth organisation, but people stick with it and get on with it. I acknowledge what the volunteers in the ACF do.

In this country, the Army Cadet Force has the first and second battalions, with 36 and 35 detachments respectively. It is one of the most successful youth organisations in the United Kingdom, and it remains committed to the development of boys and girls from the age of 12 and of all backgrounds and abilities.

Mr Shannon: In the past two years, it has been a cadet from Northern Ireland who has excelled and been the UK cadet of the year. That is an example of what the organisation does in the Province.

Lord Morrow: I thank Mr Shannon for that; it is a good point to make and to reinforce. Unfortunately, I did not reach the dizzy heights of being the best cadet in Northern Ireland, but we had other achievements of which we were proud. In my day, we had an excellent shooting team — a target-shooting team, I emphasise. I think that we got to the finals of the Belfast Telegraph Cup eight years running and won it on a number of occasions.

Through a broad range of fun-filled, exciting and challenging educational and adventure opportunities, the Army Cadet Force strives to help young people towards a responsible adulthood. It aims to inspire young people to achieve success in life, with a spirit of service for their Queen, country and local community.

That goes a significant distance in promoting the qualities of a good citizen. Throughout their time as cadets, they work towards the army proficiency certificate, which has five progressive levels of difficulty. It covers a range of topics, such as personal standards, first aid, weapon safety, fieldcraft and team tactics. Alongside those areas, the cadets are taught music, piping and drumming, and there is a range of adventure training opportunities, including abseiling and climbing. Team sports are also encouraged at every level, with competitions at regional, national and international level. There are field trips to European battlefields and international exchanges. Expeditions can range from a few nights camping in the Lake District to weeks on safari in Kenya.

The Army Cadet Force is also one of the largest operating authorities for the Duke of Edinburgh's award. If funding is not maintained, there is a danger that the organisation, which has given so much to our youth and society, will no longer exist.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Lord Morrow: The invaluable role that it has created and maintained will be lost. I strongly commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the positive effects of the Army cadets on the young people who enlist, as well as the benefits to army enrolment; and calls on the Defence Secretary to ensure that the necessary funding is allocated to this organisation to ensure its continuance.

Adjourned at 4.13 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 April 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Finance) Bill: Second Stage

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

That the Second Stage of the Local Government (Finance) Bill [NIA 14/09] be agreed.

As its name suggests, the Local Government (Finance) Bill contains provisions that concern financial arrangements for local government. Essentially, those provisions have four main purposes: first, to update and consolidate into one Act the legislative framework for local government finance; secondly, to clarify and update current provisions for payment of grants to councils by central government; thirdly, to update the provisions that relate to councillors' remuneration, which includes a requirement for councils to publish their schemes of allowances and provides for establishment of an independent remuneration panel to consider and make recommendations to me with regard to the framework of allowances that are payable to councillors; and, finally, to consolidate into one Act the provisions for payments by councils.

The need for the Bill comes from a number of sources. It has been recognised for some time that the legislative framework for local government finance needs to be updated to allow councils more autonomy to manage their financial affairs in line with modern accounting practices. That was identified formally by the local government task force's finance subgroup when it presented its final report in July 2006. Membership of that subgroup included elected members and officers from local government and officials from central government.

The councils' remuneration working group, which included representatives from the National Association of Councillors (NAC), the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), trade unions, the business and voluntary sectors, together with an independent member, carried out a review of councillors' remuneration in Northern Ireland and presented its recommendations in June 2006. Recommendations that could be given effect through subordinate legislation were introduced from 6 April 2007. The remaining recommendations that require provision in primary legislation are being taken forward in the Bill.

So that the provisions for local government finance and payments by councils may be consolidated into one Act, the Bill will repeal and, where appropriate, re-enact provisions of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

My Department consulted on the policy proposals together with the draft Bill over a four-month period last year. Responses were received from 28 consultees, including individual councils, groups of councils, joint committees, professional bodies and local government representative bodies. The majority of responses received supported the Bill, with no one opposing its overall purpose.

Part 1 of the Bill is concerned with updating the legislative framework for the administration by councils of their financial affairs. The Bill will relax controls currently exercised by central government over council finances. In particular, the Bill will remove the requirement for councils to obtain consent from my Department for borrowing, for establishing certain funds or for the application of their funds or proceeds from the sale of capital assets. Indeed, my Department will have power to issue guidance or to make subordinate legislation regarding financial administration, including the power to specify codes of practice to be followed by councils.

One of the codes of practice that my Department intends to specify is the prudential code for capital finance in local authorities issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. Adherence to that code will require councils to determine for themselves how much they can afford to borrow and to operate within affordable limits in accordance with the prudential regime.

My Department will retain some reserve powers to control borrowing by councils. In the event of a national economic crisis, my Department, with the consent of the Department of Finance and Personnel, will be able to impose a blanket limit on all councils. It will also be possible for my Department to impose, by direction, a limit on borrowing by any individual council. Limits imposed on either situation would override the prudential limits determined by councils. My Department intends to use those powers in exceptional circumstances only and as a last resort.

The Bill will also introduce provisions for councils' financial reserves, and it will enable my Department to, if necessary, make provision in regulations regarding the minimum level of reserves. The Bill will give councils a new power to invest for any purpose relevant to their statutory functions or for the prudent management of their financial affairs. My Department will issue guidance to councils to ensure the prudent investment of the funds that they hold on behalf of their ratepayers.

Part 2 of the Bill is concerned with the payment of grants to councils by central government. At present, my Department pays a general grant to councils. The division of the general grant into two separate elements, a derating element and a resources element, has caused some confusion in the past. The Bill will address that by replacing the general grant with two separate grants, a derating grant and a rate support grant, which will be calculated on the same basis as the current derating and resources elements of the general grant.

At present, my Department is the only Department to have a general power to pay grants to councils. Other Departments can only make payments of grants directly to councils where there is a statutory provision for that purpose. Where another Department wishes to pay grants that do not fall under such a statutory provision, it has to make arrangements with my Department

to pay that grant on its behalf. That means that my Department is paying out grants in relation to policies outside its remit and over which it cannot exercise control. The Bill will address that by extending to all Departments the general power to make payments of grants for their own purposes directly to councils.

Part 3 of the Bill is concerned with payments of allowances to councillors. The Bill will enable my Department to make regulations requiring councils to make and publish schemes of allowances. Northern Ireland is currently the only devolved Administration where there is no independent panel to consider and advise on the system and level of payments allowable to councillors. The Bill will enable my Department to make regulations to establish an independent remuneration panel and to make provisions for the membership and functions of that panel. The panel will conduct reviews and make recommendations for my consideration concerning the system and level of allowances payable to councillors.

Part 4 of the Bill repeals and re-enacts provisions in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 relating to payments by councils for special purposes, with one addition. In the past, there was uncertainty about whether councils had the power to make payments for an officer's membership of a professional body where that membership was considered necessary for or beneficial in carrying out their duties. That was commented on during the consultation, and the Bill now includes a revision to remove that uncertainty. A council's payment for such purposes will now be restricted to one membership for each individual officer, even when an officer holds membership of more than one body.

In summary, I believe that the Bill has numerous benefits for local government. It will provide considerable opportunities for councils to exercise control over their financial affairs by relaxing the degree of control currently imposed by central government. Rather than having to apply to my Department for consent before borrowing or applying funds and income from capital receipts, councils will now be able to take responsibility for those activities, having regard to the recognised codes of practice and subordinate legislation and guidance supplied by the Department. The Department's reserved power to control borrowing will be used only in exceptional circumstances.

I am sure that Members from all sides of the House are aware of the increased public and media interest in the allowances paid to elected representatives. The powers that will require councils to make and publish schemes of the allowances paid to councillors will set new standards of transparency, and the power to establish an independent remuneration panel will mean that I will receive impartial advice regarding councillors' allowances. The greater freedom that councils will have under the Bill will place additional responsibilities on elected representatives and officers in local government for sound and accountable financial decision-making. That is only to be expected, and freedom always has a price. However, it will increase a council's control of its own finances.

I see the Bill as a necessary and highly desirable step in developing the capacity of local government. In my statement to the Assembly on 20 October 2009, I referred to the words of my predecessor Arlene Foster when she spoke to the Assembly on 31 March 2008. In that statement she set out the Executive's vision of local government:

"our vision is of a strong, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of all citizens at their core. Central to that vision is the provision of high-quality, efficient services that respond to people's needs and continuously improve over time." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p2, col 1].

Those words still ring true today. However, the current provision for councils' financial management does not sit comfortably with that vision, and the Bill will do much to help councils meet the needs of the communities they serve, by giving them the power to manage the funds they hold on behalf of those communities.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mar Chathaoirleach an Choiste Comhshaoil, cuirim fáilte roimh an Bhille Rialtais Áitiúil. As the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, I welcome the Local Government (Finance) Bill, which will modernise the current legislative framework for local government finance and councillors' remuneration in the North.

The Committee was briefed by the Department on the synopsis of responses to the consultation at its meeting of 3 December 2009. Committee

members heard that the majority of respondents welcomed the Bill and that, in particular, councils and local government organisations welcomed the greater freedom for councils to manage their own financial affairs without having to obtain consent from the Department. However, Committee members also noted that there was some concern that that freedom may be constrained by some of the proposed regulations.

A number of respondents asked for more information about the proposed regulations relating to the accounting practices to be followed by councils, council-controlled reserves, the use of capital receipts and allowing borrowing limits to be set for national economic reasons. Officials informed the Committee that the Department will hold consultations on the proposed regulations and guidance, which the Committee welcomed.

As might be expected in today's economic climate, members were concerned about the potential costs of the independent remuneration panel that the Department is considering establishing under the Bill. The Department told the Committee that it will be an ad hoc committee, which will only be brought into being when there is a review. At an estimated cost of £50,000 per annum, this is something that the Committee is likely to welcome.

10.45 am

Members also raised queries on controlled reserves, councils' ability to borrow money and councils' internal financial controls. Those issues will no doubt be revisited in Committee.

The Department recently made the Committee aware of several proposed amendments to the Bill, including a provision to clarify that councils may pay for an officer's membership of a professional body if it is considered necessary for or beneficial in carrying out the duties of their job; minor amendments to clauses that relate to central government approval for council borrowing and credit arrangements and for the schedule of repeals; and a schedule of consequential amendments, which will deal with references in other legislation to the sections of the Local Government Act 1972 that the Local Government (Finance) Bill will repeal and replace. Committee members will, of course, scrutinise the proposed amendments closely at Committee Stage.

As soon as the House commends the Bill to the Committee, the Committee will call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals, and Committee members will be extremely interested to hear their views. I look forward to having a good, ongoing working relationship with departmental officials to ensure that the Committee is able to scrutinise the legislation properly.

Thar ceann an Choiste cuirim fáilte roimh an Bhille. On behalf of the Committee, I support the principles of the Bill.

Mr Weir: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council and as the vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

I heartily welcome the Bill. It will receive a positive response from across the local government sector, because the sector has sought this legislation for a considerable time. The Bill contains many sensible provisions. I am sure that the Minister will be the first to acknowledge that, down the years, councils stood at the forefront of democracy in representing the wishes of local residents. It is right that the Bill's additional provisions reflect and recognise the growing maturity and enhanced powers of local government. Those provisions are part of the overall jigsaw that is being put in place gradually to produce robust local government and local government that is seen as being mature and able to handle its responsibilities properly. Consequently, the Bill makes a great deal of sense.

In particular, the measures to allow greater freedom with borrowing are to be welcomed. From what I have seen of local government, it has handled its finances well and in a mature fashion. A degree of artificial constraint has in many ways required local government almost to go to its parents in the Department to ask for permission to borrow its pocket money to raise money for important capital projects. The removal of that restriction is strongly to be welcomed. Obviously, absolute *carte blanche* cannot be given, and the provisions for emergency situations — as the Minister put it, as a last resort — are right. The Bill must contain some safeguards.

As the Chairperson said, we will want to ensure in Committee that the balance struck is right. The greater financial freedom for councils that the Bill envisages is to be welcomed, and

local government will handle that freedom responsibly. Similarly, I welcome the changes that are being made for clarification purposes to delineate the various aspects of the general grant. That is common sense.

At the risk of appearing to touch on a subject for reasons of self-interest, I welcome the provision to establish a panel to advise on payments to councillors. That was recommended in the previous review of local government. In the same way, in the past number of months, decisions on Members' pay and conditions have been entirely taken out of the hands of the House and set elsewhere. Previously, the Department's decisions on payment to councillors were potentially arbitrary. To have an independent panel make decisions on payments is the right way to go.

There are major challenges as we move ahead with the modernisation of local government in relation to the pay and conditions of councillors. I am sure that those in the House who were on councils many years ago will testify to the fact that in many ways it was then effectively a labour of love and in many ways cost people money. I see my colleague from North Down, who has more council experience than most of us, nodding his head in agreement. In recent years we have started to move to a more sensible position on local government and the payment of councillors.

As we move ahead, we have to encompass two situations as regards payment. First, there has to be an acceptance that, if we are to attract people on to local councils — those who see being in local government as a career — we have to make it as plausible as possible for them to be involved in it. By the same token, we must ensure that the roles of a councillor — this is reflected in the payment — are flexible enough so that someone who has another job and wishes to combine that with being a local councillor is able to do so. We must avoid creating barriers to entry to councils on either side, because we get the best from our local democracy with as inclusive a pool of people as possible in local government. It will be deeply unhelpful if people feel excluded because of pay and conditions.

I also welcome the provisions that clarify the position of officers, and I am sure my colleagues in SOLACE in particular will be glad to see those provisions. That is also a sensible move.

We should see the Bill in the context of the growing sense of financial maturity. Although I have not been on the council for that long, I can still remember in the first year of this council term the problems that were caused by or at least under the watch of the less-lamented Lord Rooker. There was an issue about whether, for example, councils and councillors could be involved with companies, particularly when councils were involved, whether for economic development or for a range of locally good reasons. At one stage, because we were told that there was a gap in legal authority, a lot of local councils potentially had to pull out of such involvement and had their powers deeply circumscribed.

That problem was overcome, and moving from that low base to a situation in which councils are given much greater flexibility in their finances is sensible. Obviously in the Committee we will want to tease out the detail to ensure that the purposes that have been outlined by the Department are properly reflected and balanced in the Bill, but in relation to the principles of the Bill this is a good day for local government. It is a very good Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council. The Bill in large part regularises the financial aspects of local government, and it is helpful that those are compiled in one piece of legislation. If one looks through the Bill, particularly the schedules at the back, one can see the complexity that exists at present. There is a whole raft of legislation providing financial guidance, and that is not helpful. That legislation includes the Financial Provisions (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985; the Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 2001; the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 and the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. There will have to be repeals, and all of that is to be combined in one piece of legislation, which will give much greater clarity to councillors, officers and ratepayers that correct decisions are being made. That must be welcomed.

The Bill provides the Department with the powers to regularise accountancy practices in councils. Additionally, the general grant is to be broken down into the constituent elements of a derating grant and a rates support grant. Again, I welcome that general direction, although

I caution that, with the changes that may come from breaking that down into two different grants, we must be careful that there are no dramatic changes in any council area, because a relatively small change in general support grant can make a huge difference to the level of rates in any one area. Therefore, if change is to occur, it must be gradual.

Collectively, those changes will benefit local democracy by increasing openness and transparency and by regularising how local government costs are recorded. That will thereby enable greater comparison both of costs and of the relevant services that are provided. We must ensure that that enables citizens to better understand how their money is being raised and, more importantly, how it is being spent. How efficient is the operation of each local council? An increasing focus must be placed on how each local council and their departments provide value for money. I know that the public want to ensure that their money is well spent. Anything that provides additional transparency by giving realistic comparable costs is worthwhile.

I understand that the enabling powers to create a single waste authority for Northern Ireland were to be in the Bill but were withdrawn because of some political opposition. It is regrettable that those powers were not included, because they could have provided considerable savings for ratepayers. However, I look forward to a full business case coming forward in future so that everyone is aware of the savings in rates bills that could emanate from such a provision.

I welcome the enabling powers that will be given to Departments so that grants can go directly to councils without necessarily having to go through the Department of the Environment. That will remove a layer of bureaucracy and may help to create a more streamlined form of government. It may also enable local government, particularly in the future, to work with Departments to achieve their objectives in a much more concise fashion. Many councils and Departments work on similar areas, and, at present, some moneys are being passed among Departments. The enabling powers will regularise that. I understand, for example, that funding for the local community fund comes from the Department for Social Development, and there may be other areas where local government is best placed to deliver a particular service.

The Bill also includes statutory provision to enable councils to borrow money without referring to the Department, provided that the guidance is followed. It is important that guidance be given. Allowing councils greater freedom and flexibility without the need for individual referrals to Departments must be welcomed. It will reduce bureaucracy, should speed up the decision-making process and will put greater responsibility on councils. I support the concept of the Department's providing guidance, and we look forward to seeing it. We do not want to develop here the situation that developed a number of years ago in England and Wales when some local government authorities were on the verge of bankruptcy. There must be some general direction and guidance to ensure that no authority here faces such a situation.

The Bill will also enable councils to mortgage properties on the condition that there are no inventive accounting practices. That mechanism may have financial benefits, such as a reduction in the cost of borrowing. Who knows? Therefore, such a provision seems logical. However, it is important that protection be built in. The Minister said that he will ensure that councils prudently invest any money that has been raised from assets. We should remember that not long ago, a considerable number of local authorities were caught up in the collapse of the Icelandic banks. Those local authorities were attracted by higher rates of interest, which came with considerable additional risk. No ratepayers can afford to lose what could be up to millions of pounds in a risky investment.

Therefore, I concur with the Minister that any investment must be made in a prudent fashion.

11.00 am

The Bill provides that the Department can by regulation set up statutory guidance on payments to councillors. It is important that any payments must be transparent, open and proper and that we ensure the highest standards of probity in local government. The regulations should help to achieve that probity, and I look forward to seeing them in detail to ensure that that is what will be delivered.

The Bill was part of a raft of legislation aimed at modernising local government, in particular, with the prospect of the reform of local government. Although I welcome many of the Bill's provisions, it is regrettable that the reorganisation of local government seems to be stalling. Therefore,

can the Minister confirm that when he says he is putting off making a decision on whether the next local election in 2011 will be on the 11-council model or the 26-council model, he is doing so purely to put off delivering bad news until after the election? The Bill was part of a raft of legislation in preparation for the 2011 election. When will we know whether the reorganisation will occur?

Mr Gallagher: Like other Members, I believe it is a good thing that the Department is taking steps to tidy up the arrangements for local government finances and the remuneration of councillors. Those who are elected to and have some experience of local government see that as a good thing. The Minister said that the Bill will give local councils greater freedom in relation to and more control over their finances. At the same time, the Minister has made it clear today that that control will not be unfettered. When the Bill moves to Committee, that will be an area for some interesting discussion, as we try to get the right balance.

The independent panel was referred to. Clearly, that is not envisaged as a quango but as an ad hoc committee. The Minister estimates a cost of £50,000 a year, and, hopefully, that estimate is pretty close to the mark. Will the Minister clarify how the financial arrangements will work if any unforeseen circumstances arise and the committee is busier than anticipated? Will the arrangements be reviewed? If the cost exceeds the £50,000 estimate, will it still be borne by the Department or will part or all of it be passed down to local councils?

The arrangements in the Bill are something that we would all like to see developed.

Mr B Wilson: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council.

I welcome the Bill. It provides an opportunity to modernise the financial framework under which local government operates and should have been introduced years ago. In my 30 years as a local councillor, I have always felt frustrated by delays of important projects as they await departmental approval.

The Bill will give greater freedom to local authorities to manage their financial affairs without having to obtain consent from the Department. In principle, the legislation will give greater freedom to local councils, but I am still concerned that that freedom can be constrained

through the use of central government regulations. I welcome the Minister's assurance that such regulations will be used in exceptional circumstances only.

Although I welcome the principle of the Bill, I share some of the concerns that were set out in the north Down and Ards transition committee's paper. In particular, it is concerned about the proposals for the disposal of council land and property. The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 requires all disposals for less than best price to be approved by the Department. That legislation should be amended in accordance with the equivalent legislation in Great Britain, and section 96 should be repealed and replaced with an enabling power to make regulations. That would detail the purpose and limitations that apply to disposals of land at less than best price.

Clause 7 allows the Department to specify any reserve as a controlled reserve, if it so wishes. That is not compatible with the objective of giving local authorities freedom to manage their own financial affairs. It is the view of the Committee that other funds established under clause 9(1) should not be subject to any departmental control and should, therefore, not be designated as controlled reserves in accordance with clause 7.

I welcome the removal of the requirement to obtain departmental approval to borrow money and the inclusion of a power to borrow for any purpose. Trade creditors should be excluded from the definition of a credit arrangement because trade creditors are part of the working capital requirement and are not long-term debt. It is unclear whether clause 17(3)(b) removes trade creditors from credit arrangements and, therefore, from the determination of the affordable borrowing limit.

There are also concerns that longer-term liabilities such as the provision for the closure and aftercare costs of landfill sites are to be included in credit arrangements. In fact, clause 17 is confusing, and it is unclear what liabilities are to be considered credit arrangements. Furthermore, there is no definition of what constitutes a prescribed liability in accordance with clause 17(3). The legislation should be amended to provide clarity and to remove any doubt as to what constitutes a credit arrangement and, in particular, a qualifying liability.

It appears that the new provisions no longer require capital receipts to be applied in the first

instance against any money borrowed by the council for the purpose of acquiring that asset. I welcome that. However, clause 22 implies that, by regulation, the Department may require the capital receipt to be used to meet other debts and liabilities. That is contrary to the legislation's principle of giving local authorities greater freedom to manage their own financial affairs and is another example of how such freedom can be constrained by departmental regulation. Departmental control in that area is unnecessary, and clause 22 should be removed.

Part 2 of the Bill is entitled "Grants to Councils". I have concerns about the rate support grant. In particular, it appears that the formula that is currently used for the allocation of the resources grant will apply to the allocation of the rate support grant. That formula should be reviewed, because the present distribution under the resources grant does not accurately reflect the needs of the various council areas. That review would be essential in the unlikely event that we proceed with the RPA, especially in light of the establishment of new local authorities with new functions and functions that will transfer from central government to local government. However, given the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which identifies costs of over £100 million and alleged savings over the next 25 years that are totally speculative, I cannot see any case for proceeding with the RPA, particularly at a time when we have to make cuts to other essential services such as health.

I welcome the clarification on payments to councillors and the proposed legislation to facilitate the establishment of an independent remuneration panel. Those measures will end the unseemly disputes over what councillors are entitled to in allowances.

On the whole, I welcome the Bill. It will modernise local government finance and make our councils more efficient. However, some of the freedom that the Bill provides is limited by departmental regulations. That should be reconsidered, particularly at Committee Stage.

Mr Speaker: I call Jonathan Ross. Sorry, Alastair Ross.

Mr Ross: I wish that I got the same salary as Jonathan Ross.

Mr Brian Wilson is a new member of the Committee, and I am sure that he is looking

forward to scrutinising the Bill in Committee. He went into a lot of detail about the Bill. I do not intend to go into quite so much detail, given that this is Second Stage and we are looking at its general principles.

As has been said, the Bill has been broadly welcomed across the political divide and among local councils. The responses to the Bill have been very positive. The Bill recognises the importance of local government, which, in many instances, is the deliverer of services to people on the ground.

I listened to Roy Beggs talk about bad news coming after the election. However, the worst news came at the weekend when David Cameron said that Northern Ireland would be specifically targeted for the massive cuts that he has been talking about. People are concerned that the services that local government helps to provide will be cut under a Tory Administration supported by the Ulster Unionist Party.

I do not see the Bill as bad news; it is good news for a number of reasons. It reflects the added responsibilities and challenges that there will be for local government. Local government operates in a different context now. More powers are going to local government now that we have what we hope is a permanent and secure Assembly.

There are two main parts to the Bill. Others have gone into detail, and I do not want to go over all of that. We are more or less talking about modernising local government finance. As others have said, the Bill will provide more independence for local councils, allow them more flexibility and help them to respond to issues more quickly. The Bill will also afford councils borrowing powers so that they can invest, which will reflect modern accounting practices, albeit with certain safeguards, which are also important.

There is also the issue of pay and conditions for local councillors. My colleague Peter Weir paid tribute to those who have been involved in local government for many years, including his colleague Brian Wilson. It is important that we put on record our gratitude to those who have been involved in local government for many years. We tend to take for granted the fact that, when those people were involved in local government and were serving their communities, they did so under very different circumstances to those that exist today, with very little pay, as

has been said, and at considerable risk to their lives. I pay tribute to all who were involved in local government and served their communities over those years.

As has been said, it is important that pay and conditions for councillors reflect the work that they do and the additional responsibilities that local government will have. It is important that an independent panel is set up to determine or advise on pay and conditions. That is very important, particularly with the scepticism that the public have for public office and public finances.

I welcome the Bill's Second Stage. I look forward to going through the Bill in more detail in Committee, and I commend it to the House.

Mr Bell: I warmly welcome the Bill and declare an interest as a member of the National Association of Councillors and NILGA and as a councillor on Ards Borough Council.

I welcome the Bill because it is good for Northern Ireland. I welcome the Bill because it shows that the House has the legislative competence to deliver something of benefit to people on the ground. I welcome the Bill because it enhances and promotes the principles of subsidiarity. It supports our local councillors, who, as my colleague Mr Weir said, are often the first point of contact for those who are vulnerable, those who are in need and those who are seeking advice. Councillors are often the most accessible public representatives and, in the past number of years, they have probably been the least well treated in certain circumstances. The House is doing something that will deliver for local government and deliver positive benefits on the ground, which is to be warmly welcomed.

11.15 am

I thank the Minister for his continued interest in local government. Before I knew that I would ever have the privilege of serving in the House, my dear friend Councillor Margaret Tolerton told me that we had a Minister who had local government at heart and that, even though he had moved to a higher Chamber, as it were, his principles and support of local government would remain. Councillors everywhere warmly welcome the fact that the Minister has continued to support local government and is giving local councillors increased responsibility. There is no point in saying that we welcome

the work and vocation of local councillors and respect their dedication and the time that they devote to the role if we do not give them the appropriate responsibility. It is to be warmly welcomed that the Minister is doing that today.

I recall the Minister saying, after a period in which we had been stalled, that, in the forthcoming period of the Executive, new legislation will come forward to make a real difference to people. If we in the House are not making a real difference to people's lives, we do not deserve to be here. Such legislation has come forward, including the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill, the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill and today's Local Government (Finance) Bill.

I add my tribute to those that have already been paid to all the councillors from all the parties who served for many years without remuneration. They served others at considerable cost to themselves not only in respect of finance but their private and family time and so on. When I came on to Craigavon Borough Council in 1997, councillors were paid £13 for a four-hour meeting, which is a rate of just over £3 an hour. Distinguished colleagues such as Mr Savage, who is seated on the Back Benches, served before that when there was no remuneration. Despite that, those people gave of themselves and took time away from their farms and so on to serve the people of their area.

Many of those councillors have passed on or retired, and the House owes them a sincere word of gratitude for the work that they did. I offer my gratitude not only to those from my own party such as Maurice Mills and James McClure, who served for long and distinguished periods, but to others too. When I was the Mayor of Craigavon, I lost Mary McNally, Councillor Sean McKavanagh and, more recently, Councillor Ignatius Fox. Many people served well but did not have the benefits that, I hope, the Bill will bring to others. Those people did not serve for those benefits, but their distinguished service should be noted on the record.

The Bill is positive because it brings local government finance into the twenty-first century. It allows local councils to make the necessary investments, and it shows that we respect local government. It shows that we considered local government's bona fides and financial responsibility to date and will now enhance that responsibility. Councillors across Northern

Ireland have shown good stewardship of resources. When people show responsibility, we should enhance that responsibility. Let nobody doubt that we face difficult economic times. Councils will be at the forefront of protecting the interests and enhancing the economic prospects of their area.

I share the concerns of my colleague Alastair Ross about future investment. What will be the cost of the Cameron/Empey £200 million cuts to local government finance in this financial year? Is it not the reality that, if those cuts are made to a Department, Cameron and Empey will hand P45s to 150 people? If £200 million is to be taken out of the budget for teachers, nurses and doctors, Reg Empey should tell the public servants whom he meets in South Antrim that he is handing them their P45 rather than election literature.

Councils desperately need investment and modernisation. We must also respect councillors. Distinguished colleagues such as George Savage served for nothing. There are very few councillors, including those who sit in this House, who did the job for financial remuneration. Equally, however, the idea of an independent remuneration panel is the best way forward. That will allow for transparency and expertise and for the work that is being undertaken to be scrutinised properly and responded to appropriately. That does not mean that people will be able to line their pockets. It will allow for a genuinely independent process and is to be warmly welcomed.

The Bill is positive. The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment conveyed its constructive and intelligent response. I am privileged to serve on that Committee, which will consider the Bill in a detailed and constructive manner. I will conclude by paying a genuine tribute to the councillors who have already served and who stood at a time when Northern Ireland was in a very difficult place. They stood under threat but continued to provide local democracy in Northern Ireland in circumstances that the rest of western Europe did not know about. It is to them that I dedicate the success of the Bill under the aegis of a listening Minister who is taking Northern Ireland's local government forward.

Mr Kinahan: I am glad to speak on the Bill because I long to see better local government that works more dynamically, economically

and efficiently. I declare an interest as a south Antrim councillor.

I hope that the Bill fits in with all the different pieces of legislation that are coming through as we attempt to keep the RPA on board. I, too, would like to ask where the RPA is at the moment, where the Bill fits into it and whether decisions will be kept until after the election. We needed the review, and we must have a review of local government. We know that there are disagreements between the two main parties on the issue, but we must ensure that the Bill fits into any such review in every way. We must find ways to save money. We know that the councils work in different ways and that there are many economies of scale that we should be finding. I hope that the Bill fits into the overall plan.

I welcome a great deal of what is in the Bill, such as the power to regulate. However, I have a concern about what I dare to call the ivory tower syndrome of the civil servants who work up here. Sometimes, they are working at their pace, and things are slowed up completely for the councils that are waiting for decisions. For example, the local action groups (LAGs) and cluster funding that DARD is working on have held up the financing of rural grants for two and a half years as that Department puts an auditing process in place. We need a dynamic decision process that works all the way through. Although the Department knows what it is doing up here, it must do it quickly and in a way that fits in with councils.

I welcome the freedom that the Bill gives to councils to operate, but we must also have transparency. The challenge will be to achieve that in such a way that the public understand what we are doing. Information must be publicised on the web in a timely way and not when it is three or six months out of date. I welcome the idea of a 10% financial reserve. That is extremely sensible, and I wonder why the Finance Minister does not do the same in this House.

I welcome the powers to borrow to invest and to access various grants. I will not go into that subject in great detail, but I wonder sometimes how we will obtain accurate valuations on which to work out what we are borrowing and accurate information to invest on. The situation in relation to land and property valuations and the rates disaster that befell many councils means that we must be careful to ensure that we have accurate valuations and advice to work on.

I welcome the fact that Members have spoken about councillors, because those of us who are councillors are affected by pay. The Member who spoke previously was absolutely right to praise councillors as they were once the only government on the ground here through thick and thin. I add my congratulations on the work that they have done. I also welcome the independent panel. We must find a way of encouraging more people to get involved in councils and in politics. We need to get more businessmen and more people from all walks of life involved in councils. That is where it starts: that is what leads to people coming to the House.

I welcome the freedom in the Bill to let councils work. It is the sort of freedom that our colleagues in the Conservative Party want to see through the enterprise zone. I will tackle some of the cheap shots that have been aimed at us, particularly the one about P45s, as cuts have been spoken about by our own First Minister and the Labour Government. I welcome the accounting processes and controls in the Bill, but I go back to my first point, which is that it is essential that things are done dynamically and quickly so that nothing is held up.

I have one great concern from my own council. We had a talk one day on risk. If councils are going to borrow or invest, it is essential that they understand that risks are part of life. In our council, we were told in that talk that the aim was to have no risk whatsoever. If one does not have risks, one takes no decisions and gets absolutely nowhere.

I welcome the Bill fitting into the future of the RPA in whatever way that comes. It must be efficient, it must create efficiency, and it must create economic councils. I return to my key point: we must create a dynamic council system. I will welcome the Bill's Committee Stage.

The Minister of the Environment: I thank Members from all sides of the House for their consideration of the Bill and their contributions to the debate, which have been valuable and will add to our work on it. I trust that that will be further evidenced as we go through the Committee Stage.

I will respond to some of the concerns raised, first, by Mr Boylan, who was concerned that regulations could constrain the new financial arrangements. The regulations and guidance will set out the financial framework within which councils will operate. Councils will have

considerable freedom in that framework to determine how best to spend and invest their money on behalf of the ratepayers. The Bill is aimed at modernising the financial framework and introducing best practice as opposed to constraining councils' control of their finances. The Bill contains certain powers of last resort for my Department to limit a council's borrowing or specify a minimum investment reserve. Those powers would be exercised only in exceptional circumstances. My officials will be able to provide the Environment Committee with more details of what the regulations will include when the Bill goes through Committee.

Mr Beggs stressed that it was important that the Department issue guidance on the new arrangements for borrowing. I agree that that guidance will be important and confirm that it will be issued for consultation. Mr Beggs also mentioned the importance of safeguarding ratepayers when councils are investing. Councils will be required to follow guidance, which will be produced by my Department and will take into account two Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) publications: the 'Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes', and 'The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities'.

Councils will be encouraged to have policies for prudent investment of the funds that they hold on behalf of their residents. A prudent investment policy has two primary objectives: first, security or protecting the capital sum from loss; and, secondly, liquidity or keeping the money available to spend when it is needed. When the proper levels of security and liquidity are determined, it will be reasonable to consider what yield can be obtained that will be consistent with those priorities. I do not think that council officers will recommend that councils should invest in penny shares or some stock exchange in South America or the Far East.

11.30 am

The change to the general grant is merely a name change, so distribution remains the same. Therefore, no big shocks are coming here, unlike the big shock that we got on Friday night when Northern Ireland was compared to eastern Europe. I do not think that a comparison can be made between Northern Ireland and the Ceausescu regime in Romania. Mr Cameron paid the Northern Ireland community a gross

insult when he compared us to Eastern bloc countries such as Romania under the Ceauşescu regime. There will be no big shocks coming here.

What would be a big shock to my Department would be £200 million in funding cuts for Northern Ireland. Were those cuts to be applied to the Department of the Environment, they would result in a further £3 million reduction in funding, or if the Health Service were to be excluded from any cuts, a £6 million reduction. I would then have to ask Members what part of the Department of the Environment is not important.

If we had to introduce such cuts on top of what we have already had to do as a result of the downturn in the construction industry, while at the same time having to deal with other issues such as the equal pay claim and efficiency savings, our Planning Service staffing complement would be reduced to around one third of what it is at present. That would mean that we would be ineffective in fighting environmental crime, because we would have to reduce the number of personnel involved in waste control and in dealing with fly-tipping. Perhaps we could just reduce grants to local government and pass on to the ratepayer the cuts that "Chopper" Cameron wants for Northern Ireland. Therefore, Sir Reginald "Ineffective" Empey has not really delivered when it comes to Northern Ireland and David Cameron. We have this great influence, which will result in cuts coming to Northern Ireland.

Mr Gallagher asked what would happen were there a delay in establishing the remuneration panel. If the Bill is delayed, I will consider whether a further review should be undertaken, like that undertaken by the councillors' remuneration working group. He also asked whether the cost of establishing the panel will be passed on to councils. The £50,000 identified cost of the panel will be borne by the Department, and it is highly unlikely that the cost will exceed £50,000. In fact, I would want to do the job for considerably less.

Mr Brian Wilson spoke of the need to amend legislation concerning disposals at less than best price. Other local government working practices that could be streamlined to lessen or remove the need for my Department's intervention will have to be looked at. Therefore, we will consider the Member's suggestion. He also referred to the review of the rate support

grant formula. Early modelling has suggested that the formula for determining the distribution of the rate support grant would remain robust under a new council structure. We have undertaken to continue to review that position when the new council structure is established.

The Member also believes that clause 17 is unclear, and he asked whether “credit arrangements” include those with trade creditors or liabilities from closure or part-closure of landfill sites. Clause 17(3) clearly states that a credit arrangement is a liability: a liability to repay money; a liability to be met within 12 months; or a liability that may be prescribed in regulations. Trade creditors are unlikely to be other than a liability in money to be met within 12 months. Therefore, most trade creditors working for a council should certainly be paid within 12 months. It is expected that councils will apply resources to the part-closure costs of landfill sites. The effect on affordable borrowing limits is nil if the full amount of such costs is met in that way. Regulations for prescribed liabilities that are not credit arrangements will be consulted on further.

Mr Wilson also asked about the treatment of expenditure. Generally, councils will follow accounting practice when classifying expenditure and receipts. However, there are occasions when that practice is not appropriate for a public body, and we will make regulations on such occasions.

In respect of Mr Wilson's point, I confirm that some councils have shown a predisposition to tax and spend. Some councils in Northern Ireland provide services that are broadly similar to those of other councils but charge their ratepayers one third more for them. We will not create a situation where central government have no control. We are significantly relaxing controls, because we are not the communist state that the Cameronians want to classify us as being. Nonetheless, where some councils may lose the run of themselves, we must put in place stopgap measures. That is what the legislation is about. It will ensure that we will not have a situation such as that which happened in Liverpool, where Derek Hatton and his headbangers were destroying that city council. We will not allow that to happen in Northern Ireland, and, therefore, we will retain some restraints.

Mr Weir: In light of that, provision must be made. Can the Minister assure the House that, if councils default, he will not establish gulags for them?

The Minister of the Environment: We will restrain ourselves to what is in the legislation.

I once again thank Members for their contributions. I see the Bill as a valuable and significant step forward in developing a system of local government that supports strong and accountable financial administration by councils on behalf of the communities that they serve. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Local Government (Finance) Bill [NIA 14/09] be agreed.

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease until we move to the next item of business.

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to move the Consideration Stage of the Forestry Bill.

Moved. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: Members each have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in my provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are three groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn.

The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 14. The first seven amendments deal with the development of the new general duty on the Department in relation to forestry. The remaining amendments in that group deal with the power to acquire land and the duty to maintain a woodland register. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 15 to 27 and amendment No 32, which deal with protecting forests from damage. They relate to the control of animals, access to adjoining lands for that purpose and increasing protection from hazards such as fire on adjoining land. The third debate will be on amendment Nos 28 to 31, which deal with felling licences, fees for such licences and the protection of ancient or long-established woodland.

I remind Members who intend to speak that, during the debates on the three groups of amendments, they should address all the amendments in each particular group on which they wish to comment. Once the initial debate on each group is completed, any subsequent amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. It will be convenient to debate amendment No 1 with amendment Nos 2 to 14.

The first seven amendments deal with clause 1 and the development of the new general duty

on the Department in respect of forestry. The remaining amendments in the group deal with other powers and duties of the Department in relation to acquiring land, maintaining a woodland register and entering into arrangements with other parties.

Clause 1 (General duty of the Department)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 1, line 5, after “promoting”, insert “afforestation and sustainable”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 1, line 5, at end insert

“(1A) The Department must carry out that duty—

(a) in relation to forestry land, in such a way as to promote and encourage the enjoyment and recreational use of that land by the public; and

(b) in relation to other forests, in such a way as to promote the social benefits of those forests.” —

[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 3: In amendment No 2, at end insert

“(c) with a view to increasing by 100 per cent the area covered by forest by the end of 2056 relative to the area specified by the Forest Strategy published by the Department in 2006.” — [Mr McCarthy.]

No 4: In page 1, line 9, leave out “the development of afforestation,”. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

No 5: In page 1, line 11, leave out “forestry land” and insert “forests”. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

No 6: In page 1, line 12, leave out from “and” to end of line 13. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

No 7: In page 1, line 12, after “environment” insert

“, biodiversity and the mitigation of, or adaptation to, climate change”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 8: In clause 2, page 2, line 9, at end insert

“() make, on such terms and conditions as the Department thinks fit, payments for the purpose of forestry management;” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 9: In clause 4, page 2, line 39, leave out subsections (2) and (3). — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

No 10: In clause 5, page 3, leave out lines 6 and 7 and insert

“, whether for a limited period or otherwise, for the purposes of, or in connection with, providing or improving access to any land so as to facilitate the carrying out of any of its functions under this Act.

(1A) The power of acquiring land compulsorily under subsection (1) includes power to acquire, by the creation of a new right, an easement or other right over land.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew)]

No 11: In clause 6, page 3, line 25, at end insert

“(2A) The Department—

(a) shall provide and maintain a register providing such information as the Department considers appropriate as to the location and size of woodlands in Northern Ireland and the types of trees therein;

(b) shall publish that register in such form as the Department thinks appropriate at intervals not exceeding 10 years;

(c) may exercise the powers in subsection (1) (b) and (c) in connection with the provision or maintenance of that register.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 12: In amendment No 11, leave out “10” and insert “5”. — *[Mr McCarthy.]*

No 13: In clause 7, page 4, line 2, leave out from beginning to “particular” in line 4 and insert

“For the purpose of the exercise of its functions under this Part,”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 14: In clause 7, page 4, line 10, at end insert

“(4) The power under subsection (2)(a) is exercisable for the purposes of the exercise of the functions of the Department under section 4(1) only with the approval of DFP.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Before I speak on amendment No 1, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson and members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee for their detailed and constructive consideration of the Bill.

The Committee asked me to reconsider some parts of the Bill, and I was happy to do so. My officials met the Committee on several occasions, and, with goodwill on both sides, we were able to reach an agreed position. The amendments that I propose reflect the detailed work carried out by the Committee, the Office of the Legislative Counsel, legal advisers and officials in my Department. I thank everyone involved for their efforts. I also give particular thanks to the wide spectrum of stakeholders for their involvement in the Bill's development. Their advice and contributions have been invaluable.

The amendments proposed today will result in multifaceted forestry legislation that is capable of supporting a modern and forward-looking strategy. It will give the powers to deliver a wide and integrated spectrum of social, recreational, environmental and economic benefits. Traditional timber production, with its important role in providing employment in the primary and ancillary sector, will continue. However, our forests will also offer the potential to be utilised for a wide range of creative initiatives, which we will help to realise by engaging with partners across the public, private and community sectors.

Let us not forget the crucial role that forestry has in mitigating climate change. The vision of doubling forest cover in the North of Ireland over the next 50 years will be supported by powers in the Bill. We also wish to preserve our environmental heritage as a legacy for generations to come, and the Bill will promote sustainable forestry.

Before moving to the amendments, I give an assurance that my Department is fully committed to all aspects of the general duty in clause 1. Although we must demonstrate that commitment in our business plans and are accountable to the Committee for our performance, I have further assured the Committee that my Department will develop a delivery plan in respect of its general duty to forestry.

I now turn to the Bill itself. Amendment No 1 restructures clause 1 and adds some wording to bring out more explicitly the broad range of the

general duty and its benefits. Amendment No 1 was suggested by the Committee and some stakeholders, who felt that the original clause gave a sense of being more orientated towards timber production. The amendment makes the key strategic aims of afforestation and sustainable forestry more prominent and brings them into the first subsection of the clause. The expression “sustainable forestry” is also now explicitly used. Although I have been satisfied that the concept of sustainability was inherent in the clause, it is widely recognised as embracing the economic, social and environmental. I agree that the word should be flag-posted in the general duty, and I am grateful to the Committee and to stakeholders for that suggestion.

Amendment No 2 will make the social and recreational duty in subsection 1(a) more prominent. It also enhances the wording of clause 1 in response to some stakeholders’ concerns that the original draft was too understated and not sufficiently dynamic. I am known to be passionately committed to the recreational and social benefits offered by our forests, including those for health, sport and education. I wholeheartedly support amendment No 2.

We wish to encourage as many people as possible to enjoy our forests, and the new wording makes it clear that those forests are for everyone. Although I talk about “my Department’s” forests, the amended clause will also create a duty — through encouragement rather than obligation — to promote the social benefits of other forests, whether privately or publicly owned. Social forestry has a wide meaning that also includes aesthetic appreciation and visual amenity, and forestry design adds a marvellous dimension to our countryside, which everyone can enjoy, whether or not they have access to particular woodland.

Amendment No 3 to amendment No 2 proposes the insertion in the Bill of a target for increasing forest cover by 2056.

I urge Members to oppose that amendment because it is absolutely unnecessary. At Committee Stage, my Department took a solid decision, based on legal advice, to not include forest strategy targets in the primary legislation. However, lest there be any doubt as to our intentions, we made a firm pledge, with Committee agreement, to develop a delivery plan on our general duty. That, of course,

includes our forest expansion objective, which is one of the pillars of the general duty. The delivery plan will clearly outline our targets and arrangements for woodland expansion and how we will work towards that achievement. No further assurance is needed, and the amendment is absolutely unnecessary. I urge Members to oppose amendment No 3 as it is superfluous.

11.45 am

Amendment No 4 is a consequential amendment to clause 1. Amendment No 5 refers to the management of “forests” rather than “forestry land” in such a way as to protect the environment and biodiversity. That is an important distinction, because the Department’s duty will now extend to all forests, not just its forestry land. When I talk about forests, I also mean their surrounding habitats. That is a very positive amendment, and I thank the Committee and stakeholders for bringing out a richer dimension to our stewardship of our forest environments.

Amendment No 6 is a consequential amendment to clause 1. Amendment No 7 is also very positive, and it has been proposed in response to the Committee and stakeholders. They called for a more explicit and pronounced commitment to the protection of the environment. That commitment was always there, but I accept that the proposed wording makes it crystal clear. In line with wider biodiversity commitments, for example, under the proposed revision to the Wildlife Order 1985, there is now a clear reference to biodiversity. Another amendment that I suggested articulates the vital role that forests play in our commitment to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Amendment No 8 is important because it will allow my Department to make payments for the purpose of forestry management. At present, clause 2(1)(d) allows grants for afforestation and its associated activities. However, my officials noticed a gap: there is no scope for payments to be made for forestry management. To put it simply, payments may be made to establish woodlands, but not for their management once they are established. If that limitation is not addressed, it will deny us the capability of providing financial incentives for potential initiatives to ensure that our woodlands are managed properly.

Amendment No 9 to clause 4 is stylistic and prevents duplication. Subsections (2) and (3) provided for the use of partnership

arrangements to help deliver the use or development of forestry land. However, there is also provision for partnerships in clause 7. The amendment amalgamates the use of partnership in clause 7; therefore, there is no change in principle to the power.

Amendment No 10 was proposed in response to significant concerns from the Committee and stakeholders that the original power, as drafted, would allow compulsory acquisition of land for any of the Department's functions. The amendment will limit compulsory acquisition of land for the purposes of providing or improving access to support functions. That will allay misconceptions that the power could have been used to acquire land to plant trees. That was never the case. The Department sought that power primarily to help it to deal with situations in which public assets such as timber are landlocked and access not permitted, even after reasonable negotiation, and it offers to pay a reasonable and independently valued price for the land. That situation arises from time to time, and I expect it to become more of a problem with the current maturity of forests and the need for harvesting.

Unfortunately, there will be circumstances in which it is simply not possible to secure agreement with the landowner, for example, when there are multiple owners, when land is in probate or when negotiations simply break down. In those circumstances, significant public investment will be lost. We will be unable to fell sites and carry out restocking, which will make it impossible to meet our sustainable forestry obligations and duties in the Bill. However, there may be other instances in which land may be required, such as to enable access for wind farm development, tourism initiatives or biodiversity purposes.

The original power to acquire land also covers temporary arrangements and rights of way under the Interpretation Act 1954. I would have expected my Department to pursue that option in every case, but I am aware that there were some concerns. I am satisfied that the new wording in the amendment makes it very clear that there is scope for temporary arrangements, easements or rights of way as an alternative to the outright vesting of land for good.

I assure Members that I will expect my officials to seek, in all circumstances, to acquire or lease land or an interest in land — a right of

way — through negotiation and by agreement with landowners. That will always be our first option, and clause 2 provides for the acquisition of land by agreement. I strongly believe that compulsory acquisition must be contemplated only where efforts to secure agreement with a landowner have failed, where there is a real need and a clear public interest involved and where there are no other available options, for example, gaining access through our own land. Even then, the powers should be used in a way that seeks to minimise the extent of intervention, for example, by securing only the minimum level of interest required, such as a compulsory right of way or a temporary access arrangement. Full compulsory purchase will be used only when it is the only option.

It should not be overlooked that compulsory purchase powers do not need to rely on my assurances. They carry their own safeguards, and significant protections are inherent in the compulsory purchase process, including its use as last resort, the recourse to public inquiry, and compensation provisions and so forth. Importantly, under existing domestic legislation, there is the principle of *Wednesbury* unreasonableness and judicial review, and additional protections are available under human rights legislation, all of which require the Department to act always in a reasonable and proportionate way and to adopt the approach of least interference to the landowner. Again, those protections mean that, when possible, our first consideration will and must always be through agreement. Finally, as a further assurance, I have agreed to the Committee's request that my Department develop transparent guidelines on the compulsory acquisition of land and publish them on its website.

All told, I am satisfied with the constructive and pragmatic amendments to clause 2. The vesting of land in any shape or form is understandably a highly emotive issue, and I thank the Committee and stakeholders for their contribution in helping us to develop a power that can be used reasonably, proportionately and transparently.

Amendment No 11 was suggested by the Committee and some stakeholders during the scrutiny of the Bill, and I am grateful for their input. The amendment will place a duty on my Department to provide and maintain a register of woodlands in the North of Ireland. I have always recognised the importance of an inventory, and I am committed to extending our

existing inventory to more accurately reflect privately owned woodland areas. Amendment No 11 will formalise the register in legislation, and, given my Department's objective of doubling woodland, the register will provide essential baseline information to allow for effective planning. The register will contain information on the location, size and type of all woodland in the North of Ireland. We intend to review and update the register every 10 years, and that will provide the desired indication of trends in total woodland cover.

Amendment No 12 is an amendment to amendment No 11, and it seeks to shorten the interval in which a woodland register will be published. In effect, it seeks to require an updated register every five years, rather than every 10 years. The purpose of the register is to establish progress against our long-term strategic aim of forest expansion over a 50-year period. I am satisfied that 10-year intervals are appropriate to meet that purpose at reasonable public cost. The 10-year interval is not arbitrary and will establish more significant trends. I remain convinced that the use of five-year intervals would incur higher costs with little additional benefits. Therefore, I urge Members to oppose amendment No 12.

Amendment No 13 was suggested by the Committee and some stakeholders during the scrutiny of the Bill, and I am grateful for their input. The original wording is considered to be too wide and subjective in scope because it declares that:

"The Department may do anything which appears to it to be conducive or incidental to the discharge of its general duty under section 1(1)."

On reflection, I understand those reservations, and I am satisfied that the offending wording will be removed and that power will be more focused to the parameters of the Department's general duty under the Forestry Bill.

Amendment No 14 is stylistic, and it is designed to prevent duplication. It links with amendment No 9 and ensures that the partnership arrangements that are necessary to support clause 4 will be retained in the partnership arrangements for clause 7.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Paisley Jnr): I thank the members of the Committee, the departmental Bill team, as mentioned by the

Minister, the supporting officials, the Minister herself, those who provided evidence to the Committee, the Committee support team, and the Committee Clerk and his team for the time and effort that they put into making the Bill and for getting us to this point today. I also give personal thanks to the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Elliott, who helped out considerably in chairing Committees when I was not available.

During the Bill's Second Stage debate, I said that the previous forestry legislation was retrospective, that it looked at what was required after a world war and that it did not pay any heed to what was ahead of us. I firmly established the Committee's position on the Bill, which is that we want legislation that looks forward rather than back and a Bill that is expansive rather than narrow. We also want a Bill that does more than merely provide the Department with additional controls and control mechanisms, a Bill that can stand the test of time, a Bill that is forward-looking and strategic and a Bill that utilises the wealth of our forests and forest parks.

We will have precisely the Bill and, subsequently, the Act, that I have described when amendments that have been proposed by the Committee and agreed with the Minister and Department have been applied to this important piece of legislation. Therefore, I welcome today's debate, and I welcome the progress that has been made.

Since amendment Nos 1, 2 and 7, in particular, to clause 1 remove the narrow interpretation that was originally proposed by the Department and provide it with the opportunity to develop innovative ways to promote the benefits of forests and increase community involvement, those amendments will open forests as resources for education and use them as outdoor spaces for learning, informing young people about sustainable forestry and combating climate change, exploring biodiversity and outdoor activity. They will allow for the development of partnerships and for working with local councils and business delivery partners in opening forests to recreational activities. They will also facilitate community-led projects, where rural and urban communities can develop tourism, recreational and economic opportunities. The agreed amendments will help to increase physical activity, tourism income and employment opportunities. They will encourage volunteering

activity on Forest Service-owned land, increase community involvement and provide volunteers with opportunities to gain skills and to enjoy the health and social benefits of volunteering.

Those strategic actions and outcomes will be defined and put in place in a number of ways. First and foremost, the Department has agreed that it will generate a Programme for Government target that will allow the Forest Service to bring about the linking of other Executive strategies, such as the strategy for sport and physical recreation, the Investing for Health strategy, the promoting mental health and well-being strategy and urban and rural planning strategies so that the diverse benefits of forestry can be exploited. That must be welcomed.

It is unfortunate that Mr McCarthy joined the Committee only recently. As Chairperson, I welcome him to the Committee, because I believe that he can make a contribution to it; he has an interest in this subject and has already tabled amendments on it. I sincerely welcome his interest and believe that he will make a worthwhile contribution to the Committee. Since he joined the Committee only recently, he was not, unfortunately, privy to our extensive debate on the placing of departmental strategies and targets in the Bill. Had he heard that debate, he could have saved himself and his party the trouble of proposing amendment No 3.

The Committee wants the Programme for Government target for increasing forest coverage to be achieved. The Committee has been extremely critical of the Department for failing to achieve that year-on-year coverage target.

As a Committee, we will continue to scrutinise the Department and hold it accountable should it continue to fail in that regard. However, we have to be pragmatic and practical. We have to take into account the consequences of including the proposed target in primary legislation. The consequences are severe, because, if amendment No 3 is approved and the clause stands part of the Bill, it will place on the Department a significant financial burden, which it will be unable to bear.

12.00 noon

Doubling the coverage of forest by 2056 will require co-operation from farm businesses because the Department does not have an infinite supply of land to put forests on. Farm businesses recognise that economic viability

is the key factor in considering entering into forestry. However, if the incentives provided by the Department do not make economic sense to farm businesses, they will not avail of those schemes. Therefore, if the amendment is made and the Department has the statutory obligation to achieve that massive target, and if farm businesses do not see the incentives as viable, the Department will have to look at other means of fulfilling its statutory obligations. Those options could include the iniquitous compulsory acquisition of farm businesses, for example, and we cannot allow that.

For those reasons, the Committee chose not to pursue the inclusion of strategies and Programme for Government targets in the Bill. Rather, it acquired an undertaking from the Department that it will produce management delivery plans that will detail the actions that are to be undertaken to deliver on the targets contained in the Programme for Government, the 2006 Forest Service strategy and the Forest Service business plans. Those delivery plans will allow for a strategic approach to the use of forests and will ensure that the role of forests in wider land management, such as in flood management, species conservation, water quality improvement and mitigation of climate change, is communicated to local communities, stakeholders and government Departments, so that the value of woodland and forests can be included in decision-making and planning in a proactive and pragmatic manner.

The plans will be subject to the scrutiny of the Committee and will, therefore, afford the Committee the opportunity to undertake its statutory obligations in respect of policy development. That position has the unanimous backing of the Committee and, importantly, the stakeholders. Again, I pay tribute to the stakeholders who facilitated us, week in and week out, as we went through the Bill. For that reason, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is opposed to amendment No 3.

I will make a brief comment in respect of amendment No 8 to clause 2. The Committee has not had the opportunity to formally consider the amendment, as the Department drafted it only late last week. Nevertheless, as it allows the payment of incentives in respect of forestry management, I, as Chairperson, do not object to its inclusion, and my colleagues will indicate whether they are content during the debate. The Committee is scheduled to receive two

further Bills later in the session, and I sincerely hope that the Department does not repeat the practice of drafting a late insertion. However, I will not look a gift horse in the mouth.

I now turn to amendment No 10 to clause 5 and the testy matter of compulsory acquisition of land. As Members will see in the Bill, the Department originally proposed that it would have the power to acquire “any land” if required for:

“the carrying out of any of its functions under this Act.”

The Committee strongly expressed its view that compulsory acquisition of land is a method of last resort for the Department and expressed concern that the clause was far too vague on the circumstances in which the Department may wish to use such powers. While the Committee recognised the importance of access in order to draw value from the public asset, either through timber sales or the development of recreational opportunities, negotiation with the landowner should be the first and primary means of gaining access to land.

The Department responded with a redrafted clause that clearly states that those powers of compulsory purchase would be used only in connection with the provision or improvement of access to land. The redrafted clause 5 also states that the use of compulsory acquisition will be a power for “a limited period or otherwise” to emphasise that limited-life acquisition options would be considered. In the interests of transparency, the Committee requested that the Department agree to publish the guidelines for the acquisition of land on its website so that they can be assessed by the public, and I welcome the Department’s agreement to do so.

In addition, the Committee gave consideration to the protections under existing domestic legislation, which the Minister mentioned in connection with the principle of Wednesbury reasonableness, the judicial review and the additional protections available under human rights legislation, which require the Department to act always in a reasonable and proportionate way and to adopt the approach of least interference on the landowner. In light of all those factors, the Committee recognised that the powers contained in clause 5 were sufficiently fettered and that the vagueness had been removed.

You will be pleased to hear, Mr Speaker, that I will soon draw my remarks on the first group of amendments to a close. However, before doing so, I want to address the agreed amendment No 11 to clause 6 and amendment No 12, which seeks to amend the agreed amendment No 11.

In Committee, we were astonished to hear that there was no comprehensive inventory of woodland in Northern Ireland. Therefore, we recommended that the Department carry out such an inventory by collating information that is available through other departmental data sources and from work carried out by other organisations. The Committee’s view is that such an inventory is vital in ensuring that realistic targets for the expansion of woodland are set and for effective monitoring and evaluation. Planning must be founded on a sound evidence base through research. The Department responded with a proposal to provide and maintain a register of woodland but added that it would be published only when the Department saw fit. Although the Committee welcomed the inclusion in clause 6 of the intention to compile an inventory, it expressed the desire that the Department prescribe a time frame for the review of that inventory.

The Department responded with a redrafted clause, which states that the Department would review the inventory at — I stress the point — a minimal interval of 10 years, while maintaining the inventory as a live document that would be updated each year with information that comes to the Department through various schemes and attendant applications. The Committee recognised the financial implication — indeed burden — connected to the comprehensive review and compilation of such an inventory. Therefore, we firmly believe that the inventory should be a living document that is populated annually through the addition of data from, for example, the woodland grant scheme. There is, therefore, no benefit to be achieved from undertaking costly official reviews at a lesser interval. That approach has been agreed with the stakeholders and the Department, and I advise of the Committee’s intention, therefore, to oppose amendment No 12.

I do not wish my new Committee colleague, Mr McCarthy, to think that I am deliberately being negative about his party’s proposed amendments. I assure him, as is evident from the Hansard report of meetings during Committee Stage, that the scrutiny of the

legislation was exhaustive. Indeed, the Committee report details that scrutiny week in, week out. I sincerely appreciate his energy in wanting to become involved in the Bill at this late stage, and such enthusiasm should not be dampened. However, I expect that other colleagues will reinforce what I have said in their contributions to the debate.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development supports the amendments that it proposed and negotiated with the Minister and her departmental team. Those are detailed on the Marshalled List. The Committee intends to oppose the amendments tabled by Dr Farry and Mr McCarthy.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I want to thank everyone who was involved in working through the Bill, particularly during its Committee Stage.

Sinn Féin will support amendment No 8, which is the late amendment tabled by the Minister relating to payments for the purposes of forestry management. My party will oppose the Alliance Party's amendments, not because they have come from that party, but because, as the Chairperson has already said, the Committee has scrutinised all the Bill's clauses in great detail. That required a substantial piece of work.

The Bill, in its original format, was not ambitious enough. This is the first Bill on the subject in over 50 years, and it will probably be a long time before another one is introduced. Therefore, it was important that the Committee showed vision. The Committee has made the Bill fit for purpose through agreed amendments and through working with all the relevant stakeholders, the Minister, forestry officials and the political parties represented by members of the Committee.

I welcome the promotion of forestry as a means to mitigate the effects of climate change. It is essential that that is at the heart of the Bill. Since the beginning of the process, I have argued that, because the Bill must endure for the next 30 or 40 years, we must be forward-thinking and have the vision to use forestry for flood management; biomass opportunities; green procurement opportunities; to offset agricultural emissions; for recreational purposes; health and well-being; and tourism and business opportunities.

Amendment No 2 will encourage the increased use of forests to improve the recreational facilities that are currently available in forests and to introduce new facilities by developing partnership arrangements with public and private bodies. That will enable more local people, particularly in rural communities, to set up business enterprises that will have the direct potential to create many hundreds of jobs in tourism-related businesses, such as mountain biking, high rope-obstacle activities, children's play parks and activity centres and outdoor fitness suites. For tourism to be embraced by the entire population, people must be afforded the opportunity to create new business ventures that will provide visitors with exciting holiday activities. Forests must provide a balance of economic, environmental and social benefits. Opportunities for additional recreational and leisure pursuits should have a positive impact on general health and well-being and be beneficial to the economies of rural areas by attracting more visitors.

With regard to recreation, working in partnership with councils and community groups can bring about the development of play facilities, such as adventure playgrounds for children and teenagers, and educational projects. As the Minister and Chairperson said, there are potential benefits to health and well-being. Rather than people receiving prescriptions for mental health issues and stress, they could have a year's subscription for car parking and access to forest parks. That works in other areas. Local councils afford people who have problems with stress, mental health and obesity the opportunity to avail themselves of leisure centres and swimming pools, rather than being given prescriptions. It is worth looking at that.

As I said, the use of forestry to combat the negative impact of climate change is paramount and should be at the heart of the Bill. With amendment No 7, it is. It is of paramount importance to everyone that carbon sinks are created around towns and cities. A small amount of forestry land in the Department's estate will be suitable for the provision of wind farms. The forestry sector in the South has embraced renewables and has worked in partnership with energy providers to deliver for taxpayers.

There is evidence that forestry could help to manage flooding. Forests that are close to towns can provide opportunities for social recreation and well-being and act as carbon

sinks around those areas, thus combating traffic emissions in town and city centres. Biomass represents a good opportunity for the Assembly to replicate what has been done in Scotland, where wood-burning power stations have been built. It will also create confidence for people to buy into biomass technologies and start to grow timber for that purpose. The stations use willow and the remnants of the harvesting of timber, and they would help the agriculture industry to make a significant contribution to the reduction of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions through the development of economically viable renewable energy technologies and enterprises. Renewable energy through our forests provides an excellent opportunity for the rural community to allow farmers to maximise the use of their land.

12.15 pm

We need to be conscious of what climate change will mean for the future and what species are likely to be able to grow. Some species may be at the edge of their tolerance already. We need to think about what species we want to plant in relation to their benefits throughout the spectrum and their ability to survive in the future. A tree planted now will only mature in 100 years, when the environment will be very different.

As the Minister and the Chairperson said, amendment No 10 was controversial, and the Committee, particularly my colleague Francie Molloy, was reluctant to give the Department powers to vest. Most farmers get on with each other and allow shared access. However, in a situation in which two neighbours do not agree, there must be measures to allow the timber to be taken out. It does not have to be a permanent arrangement; we would work towards something akin to a long-term lease. However, in larger schemes that may involve large amounts of public money, that would not be feasible in the short term. I welcome the proposed amendments relating to that. They are a huge improvement, and they have taken on board what Committee members said about clarifying that power, which will be required mainly for access purposes.

The development of road infrastructure and access is costly. A lot of public money could be invested in permanent infrastructure. However, I do not see the logic of investing a lot of money to develop temporary infrastructure; that is

not feasible. Nevertheless, in a situation in which, for example, neighbours do not get on, that measure will be needed to provide access across land. Overall, I welcome the amendment regarding access. As has been outlined, it is a last resort measure, and the Minister has given that guarantee today.

On the same train of thought, I would like to see the temporary solution of working together used on most occasions. However, I am pragmatic enough to know that there will be occasions when a more permanent solution will be required, although I do not think that it will be used often. It could be used for large-scale operations, such as a wind farm, where access would need to be improved to accommodate large vehicles. That could involve the construction of a bridge or the widening of lanes. Public money should not be put into such temporary construction, only for it to be taken away in 20 years' time. That is not practical.

We have to be realistic, and the Bill must be fit for purpose. The Committee has moved through the amendments, and it has made the Bill fit for purpose. I support the amendments agreed by the Department, but I oppose the amendments proposed by the Alliance Party.

Mr Elliott: I declare an interest as a landowner and as the owner of a small portion of forestry land. I thank all those involved in the Committee Stage, particularly the Committee staff, members and the Chairperson, as well as officials from the Department and the Forest Service. I also thank the Minister for coming to a compromise on most of the issues, which was not always easy. The number of amendments that have been agreed calls into question how much thought went into drafting the Bill in the first place. That is something that officials need to look at in the future with regard to other Bills.

I hope that the Forestry Bill will lead us towards a productive forestry process that promotes forestry for the foreseeable future, because that has been lacking in an area that has perhaps the smallest amount of forestry cover in Europe. I also hope that we can promote and develop the social and environmental benefits of forestry.

I am broadly pleased with the idea of creating an advisory stakeholder body, and I am aware that that was looked on positively by the Forest Service. However, we do not want another costly quango that will be a burden on the Department.

In discussing the Bill, the Committee wanted to ensure that the Forest Service had the scope to be an effective and efficient organisation, while placing enough control on its powers to ensure that it could not wield unnecessary control over farmers and landowners. I hope that we have managed to strike that balance.

The earlier amendments deal with technical issues and improving the wording of certain clauses. I support the amendments that were suggested by the Committee.

Amendment No 8 appeared quite late. It ensures that payments can be made to incentivise the management of forestry land, and, coming from the farming community, I have yet to meet a farmer who would not accept payments of any description, especially when they cost nothing. Therefore, even though the Committee has not yet had the opportunity to discuss that amendment, I will accept it.

Amendment No 10, which deals with clause 5 and the compulsory acquisition of land, was the subject of a great deal of discussion. From the beginning, I was adamant that that clause gave the Forest Service too much power and was too open-ended, so, although we might not have got all that we wanted, amendment No 10 provides a reasonable compromise. It does not allow the Forest Service overall control of the farming community or landowners, but it does give it enough scope to ensure that the public finances invested in forestry lands can be utilised. I am also pleased that the guidelines on the compulsory acquisition of land will be published on the Department's website. That will give farmers some security by letting them know that the Department cannot take over their land straightaway and that a process must be gone through before land can be acquired compulsorily. In general, farmers' and landowners' experience of dealing with Departments in the compulsory acquisition of land has not been good; therefore I was adamant that clause 5 should not allow the Department to continue to ride roughshod over farmers and landowners.

Amendment No 11 deals with clause 6 and the protection of ancient woodlands. I am very keen to protect such woodland, because it is a valuable resource for our community and the environment. However, we must be realistic about its inventory and how it is dealt with, and I feel that the Committee has reached a

satisfactory compromise with the Department on that issue.

I am pleased that the Bill is progressing, and I look forward to speaking on some of the other groups of amendments later in the debate.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Minister for moving the Consideration Stage of the Bill. The SDLP and I support the Forestry Bill and the ministerial amendments. For a number of months, I was not a member of the Agriculture Committee, so I missed out on many of the debates, and I did not get the opportunity to contribute as much as I wished. I am now back on the Committee, so, from now on, I will get a chance to contribute.

I have two brief comments to make, the first of which is on clause 3, which empowers the Department to provide facilities to improve amenities on forest land, such as toilet facilities and places for meals and refreshments. I come from south Down, and that will be a tremendous boost for the many forested parts of the area, including Newcastle. I welcome the clause, and I hope that, when proposals reach the planning stage, the Planning Service will share the views of all Members. There are already difficulties in the Mournes with planning issues on such facilities.

I made my second comment when the Bill first came to the Committee and the Minister was present. I expressed concern about compulsory acquisition, which is dealt with in clause 5. I am happy that that clause is to be amended, because I would have had difficulties if that had meant that general requisition of land would have taken place. I understand the commercial importance of having access to forestry for purposes such as removing felled trees. As I read through the Bill, I thought that improvements could be made by allowing that access. For example, millions of pounds could be saved over the years by allowing the Fire and Rescue Service access along the routes into forests. Some good will emerge from that clause, and I hope that we can reach agreement with farmers and landowners.

I agree with the Minister and the Chairperson of the Committee that the Bill is a forward-thinking document, and I am happy to support it.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Consideration Stage of the Bill and the input not only of the Minister but Committee members and support

staff. I thank the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Paisley Jnr, for his kind words of welcome to me, although I have not even got my nose in the door yet. I had a long speech prepared on the Bill, but the past hour has been my most uncomfortable one in the Chamber since I was elected. I know very little about the Bill, and it would be unfair of me to start to throw my weight around on something into which I had no input, so forgive me for all of that.

The Alliance Party wants to see improvements, and we support and welcome the Bill. The Committee has made good progress, and we are happy to support all the amendments. It is unfortunate that the Minister, the Chairperson and other Committee members do not support our two amendments. I was going to spend the next half hour speaking, but I know that Members are waiting for their lunch, so I will not detain them any longer.

I wish to speak to amendment Nos 3 and 12. Amendment No 3 asks the Department to double the area of woodland over the next 50 years. There will not be many of us around to see the outcome of the Department's commitment to increase the amount of forestry over the next 50 years. That will be for the next generation and our grandchildren. I understand that the 2006 forestry strategy includes a target on that, and all we are asking for is a commitment on the legislative standing of that. Those are my instructions to put forward on amendment No 3.

Amendment No 12 asks the Department to carry out a woodland inventory every five years as opposed to every 10 years. I listened to the debate, and it appears that that amendment has hit the wall and is not going anywhere. However, our opinion is that an inventory that is updated every five years will allow the Forest Service to see how it is doing in meeting its commitments. Although it could be said that not much will change every five years, that would allow better statistics to be calculated and allow better accountability. It would also make the job of the Forest Service easier because it would be able to target areas that are not doing so well. I shall not prolong the debate, and I commend the two amendments.

12.30 pm

Mr Savage: I support the Forestry Bill, including the 28 amendments to it that the Minister tabled. Those amendments have been agreed

by the Committee. The introduction to the Assembly Research and Library Service's paper on the Forestry Bill highlights the fact that there are 124 state forests in Northern Ireland. Many people in Northern Ireland will not know that. Those state forests are managed by Forest Service, which is an executive agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The agency's framework document sets out its aims, which are very straightforward yet very interesting:

"to contribute to the economic development of the entire forestry sector in Northern Ireland, whilst at the same time promoting the sustainable management of forests for multiple use and conserving and enhancing the rural environment".

That is an interesting statement, because half of the people in Northern Ireland do not even know the number of forests that we have in our wee country. The Department owns quite a huge hunk of land, and we must realise that there is no more land being created in Northern Ireland, so what we have must be used to its full potential.

I had a speech prepared, but I will not repeat everything that other Members have said. Some interesting points were raised in Committee. One such point was that the forest industry must be opened up. Forests are public land, which must be opened up so that people can use it for leisure pursuits and a wide range of other purposes. However, the general public must realise that Forest Service has laid down a code of conduct, and that code of conduct must be observed. With the dry spell of weather that we have had in the past three or four weeks, we have seen what can happen if the code of conduct is not observed. Opening up forests to the general public can only make a big contribution to the well-being of the whole community in Northern Ireland.

I commend the Bill to the House, and I know that everybody will support it. It contains far-reaching provisions and highlights many issues. Where land has not been brought to its full use, an opportunity presents itself to bring that land into use for the well-being of the public and Forest Service.

The Bill also brings into play a different element. An issue that I pursued right through Committee Stage was that people on horseback should be able to use forests, because they cannot go on the roads. Health and safety is a big issue as

far as people on horseback are concerned, and the legislation presents an opportunity for them to get off the roads. The Bill opens up a new chapter for them.

All Committee members played a big part in shaping the amendments. Amendment No 3, tabled by my colleague Kieran McCarthy, opens up a new area for discussion, which can perhaps be considered at a later date.

What has taken place will bring Forest Service into the twenty-first century, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the Minister will respond to and conclude the debate on the first group of amendments.

The sitting was suspended at 12.35 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Before addressing the substantive elements of this afternoon's debate, I wish to acknowledge the volume of work that has been done on this part of the Bill. The Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development described the constructive and detailed work that went into getting the Bill to where it is today. A kaleidoscope of stakeholders contributed time and effort to develop this multifaceted primary legislation. I also acknowledge that the Committee had a lengthy consultation and put great effort into ensuring that the various and often passionately diverging views were heard. I know that there were many constructive and pragmatic evidence sessions with my officials, and I thank the Committee for that.

It is not easy to get legislation exactly right for everyone; however, we have a responsibility to strike the best possible balance. As some Members said, it is more than 50 years since the last Forestry Act, and this one might have to last as long. Indeed, Ian Paisley Jnr may have dropped the "Jnr" by the time the next forestry Bill comes round.

The sustainable stewardship of forests and their environment is our responsibility. It is entrusted to us to look after that precious heritage for our children and for future generations. Clause 1 is supported by different but equally important pillars. The pillar of economic forestry supports the timber industry, on which the wider forestry programme depends. Through that sector, we secure important revenue from timber supply and many times its value in economic and employment terms, particularly in rural areas. The growing forests provide the social and environmental values that we all wish to expand, and having those benefits underpinned by a vibrant timber industry sector is crucial. Environmental forestry and biodiversity commitments, as well as our commitment to doing our bit to mitigate climate change, reflect those important values from forests.

Members mentioned the educational importance of forests and their ability to become an outdoor classroom. That, too, is important. The Committee Chairperson, George Savage and Willie Clarke referred to the importance of

the social and recreational benefits of forestry, which the Bill supports. I was interested to hear Mr Clarke's point about prescribing activity opportunities through forests; that deserves wider consideration. Given that the Bill deals with the twin themes of forest expansion and sustainable forestry, it is no wonder that there are so many different and passionate interests. It is a bit of a challenge to balance them all, and that was evident from today's debate.

Members raised a number of issues. The new amendments that Dr Farry and Kieran McCarthy tabled emphasised the importance of the first group of amendments, which have much to do with the general duty of my Department. That duty is a progressive one to take forestry and all its undoubted benefits into the twenty-first century. I welcome Kieran McCarthy to the Committee, and I look forward to working with him. I know that he will be a passionate member of the Committee. Do not worry, Kieran; you have plenty of colleagues to keep you right.

I understand that behind Members' contributions today is a call for assurances, because duties are not enough, and we need to deliver on commitments. That is why I have made a solid commitment today to a delivery plan that shows how my Department will deliver on the targets to which it commits. We all know that with power comes responsibility, and it is the same with this Bill. Several of the amendments are concerned with limiting powers, putting them into perspective or giving more scope for flexibility and negotiation in their use, which can only be a good thing. I am grateful to stakeholders and the Committee for helping us get the legislation right.

It is no surprise that Members raised issues around the compulsory acquisition of land, as vesting of land is one of the most emotive of subjects. I understand Members' apprehensions and, indeed, share them. However, compulsory purchase powers are the hallmark of most primary legislation, and, through the Bill, we will ensure that human rights are protected. We will make agreement and negotiation our first options; we will offer scope for alternative arrangements, such as temporary usage or rights of way; we will offer appeal and compensation; we will act transparently and with the lowest level of interference; and, of course, we have dispelled the myth that the legislation is about vesting land on which to grow trees. The powers will be used for no more than access.

Tom Elliott, who is not in his seat, mentioned establishing a stakeholder advisory body. The existing arrangements for engaging with stakeholders are adequate and appropriate, so we will leave it at that. Although stakeholder engagement is important, and we want to work with stakeholders, there is no need to set up a stakeholder advisory body.

I trust that Members are content that we have struck the right balance in this crucial group of amendments to the foundations of the Bill and that they accept the sincere assurances that I have given. I firmly believe that the Forestry Bill is a very good piece of legislation, one that was developed in the spirit of co-operation.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 1, line 5, at end insert

“(1A) The Department must carry out that duty —

(a) in relation to forestry land, in such a way as to promote and encourage the enjoyment and recreational use of that land by the public; and

(b) in relation to other forests, in such a way as to promote the social benefits of those forests.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: An amendment has been tabled to amendment No 2. Therefore, I call Mr Kieran McCarthy to move amendment No 3.

Amendment No 3 proposed: In amendment No 2, at end insert

“(c) with a view to increasing by 100 per cent the area covered by forest by the end of 2056 relative to the area specified by the Forest Strategy published by the Department in 2006.” — [Mr McCarthy.]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 3 is an amendment to amendment No 2, so I will put the Question on amendment No 3 first.

Question put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.

Amendment No 4 made: In page 1, line 9, leave out “the development of afforestation,”. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

Amendment No 5 made: In page 1, line 11, leave out “forestry land” and insert “forests”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Amendment No 6 made: In page 1, line 12, leave out from “and” to end of line 13. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Amendment No 7 made: In page 1, line 12, after “environment” insert

“, biodiversity and the mitigation of, or adaptation to, climate change” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Principal powers of the Department)

Amendment No 8 made: In page 2, line 9, at end insert

“() make, on such terms and conditions as the Department thinks fit, payments for the purpose of forestry management;” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 (Use or development of forestry land)

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 9, I remind Members that amendment No 9 is a paving amendment for amendment No 14.

Amendment No 9 made: In page 2, line 39, leave out subsections (2) and (3). — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 (Compulsory acquisition of land)

Amendment No 10 made: In page 3, leave out lines 6 and 7 and insert

“whether for a limited period or otherwise, for the purposes of, or in connection with, providing or improving access to any land so as to facilitate the carrying out of any of its functions under this Act.

(1A) The power of acquiring land compulsorily under subsection (1) includes power to acquire, by

the creation of a new right, an easement or other right over land.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6 (Inquiries, information, etc.)

Amendment No 11 proposed: In page 3, line 25, at end insert

“(2A) The Department –

(a) shall provide and maintain a register providing such information as the Department considers appropriate as to the location and size of woodlands in Northern Ireland and the types of trees therein;

(b) shall publish that register in such form as the Department thinks appropriate at intervals not exceeding 10 years;

(c) may exercise the powers in subsection (1) (b) and (c) in connection with the provision or maintenance of that register.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Amendment No 12 proposed: In amendment No 11, leave out “10” and insert “5” — [Mr McCarthy.]

Mr Speaker: As amendment No 12 is an amendment to amendment No 11, I will put the Question on amendment No 12 first.

Question put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 11 be made, put and agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 (Incidental powers)

Amendment No 13 made: In page 4, line 2, leave out from beginning to “particular” in line 4 and insert

“For the purpose of the exercise of its functions under this Part,” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Amendment No 14 made: In page 4, line 10, at end insert

“(4) The power under subsection (2)(a) is exercisable for the purposes of the exercise of the functions of the Department under section 4(1) only with the approval of DFP.” — [The

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

2.15 pm

Mr Speaker: We come to the second group of amendments for debate: amendment Nos 15 to 27 and amendment No 32. Those amendments relate to the control of animals, access to adjoining land for that purpose and the protection of forests from hazards, such as fire on adjoining land. I call the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to move amendment No 15 and address all the other amendments in the group.

Clause 8 (Control of animals in forests)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I beg to move amendment No 15: In page 4, line 15, leave out “wild animals” and insert

“deer or hares (other than Irish hares)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 16: In page 4, line 17, leave out from “either” to “purposes” in line 18 and insert “forest”. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

No 17: In page 4, line 20, leave out “at any time, kill, take or destroy any wild animals”.

and insert

“take, kill or destroy any deer or hares (other than Irish hares)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 18: In page 4, line 24, leave out subsection (4). — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

No 19: After clause 8 insert

“Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest

8A. – (1) In this section –

‘land A’ means any land falling within section 8(2);

‘land B’ means any land –

(a) which adjoins land A; or

(b) any part of which is within 500 metres of any part of land A.

(2) The following provisions apply where the Department is satisfied that trees growing on land A are being, or are likely to be, damaged by wild animals present on land B.

(3) The Department may serve on the occupier of land B a notice –

(a) stating that trees growing on land A are being, or are likely to be, damaged by wild animals present on land B; and

(b) requesting that the occupier –

(i) take effective steps, within 3 months of the date of the service of the notice, to prevent the damage; or

(ii) grant permission for an authorised person to enter land B and exercise the powers conferred by subsection (4).

(4) An authorised person may with the permission of the occupier take, kill or destroy any wild animals on land B.

(5) If land A or land B is unoccupied, subsections (3) and (4) apply with the substitution of references to the owner of that land for references to the occupier.

(6) In this section ‘wild animal’ means any animal which is living wild and is likely to damage trees, other than –

(a) a bird;

(b) the Irish hare;

(c) an animal for the time being included in Schedule 5 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (NI 2).” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 20: In clause 9, page 5, line 14, leave out subsection (8) and insert

“(8) Where the occupier of land A is not the Department, any costs incurred by the Department in connection with an authorised person taking action under subsection (7) are recoverable as a civil debt from the occupier of land A.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 21: In clause 9, page 5, line 19, leave out “section 8” and insert

“section (Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 22: In clause 10, page 5, Line 27, leave out paragraph (b) and insert

“(b) requesting that, within 30 days from the date of service of the notice –

(i) any vegetation growing on the part of the land within a distance of 15 metres from the boundary of the forest be removed or destroyed; or

(ii) such other measures as are specified in the notice be taken in relation to that vegetation for the purposes of reducing the risk of the forest being damaged by fire.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 23: In clause 10, page 5, line 33, at end insert

“or take such other measures in relation to that vegetation as the Department considers appropriate for the purposes of reducing the risk of the forest being damaged by fire.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 24: In clause 11, page 5, line 39, leave out “section 7 or 7A” and insert

“section 7(1)(a) or 7A(1)(a)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 25: In clause 11, page 5, line 41, leave out “Article 10(1) or (2) or 19(1), (2)”

and insert

“Article 19(1)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 26: In clause 11, page 6, line 3, after “8(3)” insert

“, (Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)(4)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 27: In clause 11, page 6, line 4, after “section” insert

“(Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)(3) or”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 32: In clause 38, page 19, line 21, at end insert

“() No order may be made under subsection (1) in relation to any provision of section 9 unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann

Comhairle. Amendment No 15 is the first of the group and deals with the protection of forest trees from damage, mainly by wild animals. I should make it clear that the management of deer populations and the control of wild animals to protect trees are long-established parts of sustainable forest management and are a feature of forestry legislation in the South and in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Wildlife Order 1985 provides for dispensations for the killing of deer without licence during the close season to protect crops, horticulture and growing timber. The Department remains of the view that it should have such a power to protect a valuable public asset such as its forests and to ensure the protection of private woodlands. That will support wide forestry obligations and the desire of both the Department and the Committee for new woodland creation and the sustainable management of existing woodlands. Nevertheless, I recognise and firmly believe that those powers should be proportionate and as close as possible to the spirit of wildlife and game preservation legislation and welfare considerations.

Most of the amendments to clause 8 were suggested by the Committee and stakeholders during their scrutiny of the Bill, and I am grateful for their input.

Amendment No 15 is positive. In the original draft of the Bill, the Department and other woodland owners were permitted to control any wild animals on their land to protect their trees. Woodland owners — indeed, any landowners — are normally permitted to kill any wild animals on their land, such as foxes, rabbits, hares, vermin etc but not protected animals. The original definition in the Bill was too wide and, in order to protect woodlands, would have allowed the killing of animals protected by the Wildlife Order, such as red squirrels, badgers, otters, bats etc. I am happy to approve the closing of that loophole. The definition of wild animals has been replaced so that the clause refers only to

“deer or hares (other than Irish hares)”

rather than “wild animals”. The relevant defences against prosecution under wildlife or game legislation for the killing of protected animals have been removed from the protections under clause 11.

Another element of amendment No 15 is a personal provision that I have brought forward to

exclude the Irish hare from any culling during the close season. I feel strongly that the Irish hare should be protected as a special indigenous species. In my response to the recent consultations on the amendments to wildlife legislation, I expressed my disappointment about the decision to rely on species habitats plans, rather than outright protection.

Amendment No 16 is intended to address a narrow definition of the trees to be protected. It occurred to us that we had limited that to trees grown for commercial timber. It is vital that we protect all our forests, whatever their purposes — social, environmental etc. Therefore, we have used the word “forest” in its widest and most generic sense.

Amendment No 17 is one that I suggested and is self-explanatory. It puts the taking of animals to first place in the sequence of possible control measures before their killing or destruction. Another aspect of amendment No 17 is the seemingly innocuous removal of the words “at any time”. To reflect that deer or hares could be killed, as necessary, during the close season, the wording used was that animals could be killed “at any time”. Unfortunately, that created a loophole to kill animals at night, which justifiably raised welfare concerns, because such activity is expressly prohibited under the Wildlife Order and game legislation. I was happy to remove that wording, and I am grateful to the Committee and the stakeholders for highlighting that point.

Amendment No 18 is consequential to clause 1. Amendment No 19 introduces a new clause to the Bill, titled:

“Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest”.

This new clause must be seen in the context of amendment No 32, which affects clause 9 and will render that clause dormant unless damage to woodlands by wild animals such as deer warrants it being activated at some time in the future. In the absence of full clause 9 powers, the Department will rely on the new clause. I hope that Members do not mind my pausing to refer to clause 9, but I hope that it will kill two birds with one stone and provide context to the amendments to that clause.

The original clause 9 powers dealt with the control of animals on adjoining private land. The Department may serve a notice requiring the

landowner to deal with the problem, ascertained as necessary by powers of inspection. Failing that, it will serve another notice that an authorised person will enter the land to control the animals. The Department would have had a right to impose costs for any such measures on the adjoining landowner. The Committee and stakeholders had serious concerns about clause 9 and the power to enter private land to control animals, particularly deer, and charge private landowners for control of animals on their land.

Although I acknowledge, as pointed out by the Committee, that the threat presented by deer is not major at present, my Department took the prudent and strategic view that, given our aim to double forest cover over the next 50 years, the deer populations may, at some time, expand to numbers that justify that power. Therefore, it made sense to take the opportunity to put contingency powers in place. It must be remembered that taking powers and using them are two entirely different matters. There are human rights aspects involved with entering private property, and it can be justified only in a reasonable balance with the public interest. My Department would not have taken that power lightly, and it would and could have used it only in the event of a serious and recognised problem. Having said that, I am satisfied that we have reached a compromise. The new clause removes the compulsory element and takes a totally consensual approach as reflected in its title “Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest”.

The Department may serve a notice but only to request that the occupier of adjoining land take effective steps to prevent damage to adjoining woodland. Failing that, the Department may request permission to control the animals, but it has no power to enter the land without that permission. Furthermore, the clause contains no power to impose any costs on the adjoining landowner even if, on agreement, the Department controls any animals on his or her land. The new clause will allow my Department to retain some powers to protect a valuable public asset such as the Department’s forests and, indeed, to ensure the protection of private woodlands. That will support wider forestry obligations and my Department’s desire for new woodland creation and the sustainable management of existing woodlands.

It must be remembered that control of wild animals is not just about deer but includes other wild animals such as rabbits, hares and grey squirrels, which are an ongoing menace to woodlands. Of course, we will still be left with ongoing depredation by deer but, admittedly, not on a scale to justify the compulsory clause 9 powers. We had always intended to work with the principle of consent. After all, that is also built into clause 9, in which the owner had first option to deal with any problem before the Department may intervene.

It is always reasonable to assume that the owner of adjoining land would not object if the Department were to intervene against deer, rabbit or hare which may also be damaging his or her crops. That power, along with my Department's general duty to promote sustainable forestry, provides legal support and authority to authorise persons who may enter adjoining land, even with agreement to control animals.

Amendment No 20 addresses the concerns of the Committee and stakeholders about charging private landowners for any control of animals on their land to protect adjoining woodlands. The amendment removes the power to impose such costs. Instead, my Department will retain the discretion to impose costs on the woodland owner on behalf of whom the remedial measures will be taken. That is a fair and reasonable alternative, and I am grateful to the Committee and stakeholders for helping us to get it right.

Amendment No 21 is a consequential amendment to the new clause inserted by amendment No 19.

Amendment No 22 relates to clause 10, which protects forests from damage by fire, especially gorse in uncultivated land adjoining a forest and up to 15 m from the forest boundary. As drafted, the clause allowed the Department to issue a notice requesting that any such vegetation that presents a potential danger to adjoining forests be removed or destroyed. Failing that, an authorised person could enter the land to remove the vegetation. The Committee and the Ulster Farmers' Union were concerned about that clause — the power to enter private land and to remove or destroy vegetation — which could place the landowner in breach of other departmental schemes such as the countryside management scheme. My Department will not seek to claw back any such grant as a result of

that power. I also expect the principle of force majeure to apply fully in such cases.

Amendment No 22 will provide more scope for the landowner to take remedial action without having to remove or destroy vegetation. Alternatives will be specified in a notice and could, for example, include management to reduce combustible material or flammability. The Committee has urged that negotiation with the adjoining landowner should always be the first option. I agree that that should be the initial approach in every case. I should add, again, that entry onto private land and interference with private property carries a human rights implication. Along with the principle of reasonableness and proportionality, it requires the smallest amount of interference. That, in itself, is a compelling reason for proper communication and negotiation. I am grateful to the Committee and stakeholders for their input into amendment No 22. Amendment No 23 is consequential to amendment No 22.

Amendment Nos 24 to 27 reduce the protections and the relevant offences that are contained in clause 11 against prosecution under wildlife or game legislation. As such, they are consequential to the amendments to clause 8 and have a bearing on the new clause, entitled "Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest" and on clause 9. For example, amendment No 24 removes a defence against night-time killing of hares, which is covered by section 7 of the Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928.

Amendment No 25 removes a defence against the night-time killing of deer, which is covered by section 19 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985. It also removes the defence against the killing of any protected wild animals under section 10 of that Order. Amendment Nos 26 and 27 are consequential to the new clause inserted by amendment No 19.

Amendment No 32 is an amendment to clause 38. It addresses the Committee's request that clause 9 remain dormant until the evidence base of damage to woodlands, particularly by deer, justifies its activation but only by affirmative resolution.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development:

The Committee supports amendment Nos 15 to 18 to clause 8. The Committee recommended that the Forest Service redraft that clause to provide

clarity, clearly define the term “wild animals” and include an exemption for the Irish hare. The Committee also expressed concern that the Department proposed the taking of animals at any time, giving rise to concerns about animal welfare, specifically about the killing of deer in the close season. Again, the Department is to be commended for listening to the Committee and agreeing to amend clause 8 to our satisfaction.

The Committee supports the insertion of a new clause, through amendment No 19, and amendment Nos 20 and 21 in respect of clause 9. The Committee was not content that the Department was taking powers to enter private land to control animals deemed to be damaging trees on departmental land. The Committee was further opposed to the concept that the Department would also have the power to charge private landowners for the control of animals on their land. The Committee regarded the imposition of such charges as completely unacceptable. The Department accepted the Committee’s concerns but wished to retain the discretion to recover costs from landowners who derive benefit from any intervention. The Committee is content to allow that, with the reassurance that, in such instances, when a requirement to control animals on adjacent land arose, the first approach would be to request that the landowner takes it upon himself to act.

When scrutinising the Bill in Committee, we constantly sought evidence to support the inclusion of the clauses that were presented to us. One such example of that was clause 9, which deals with control of animals on land adjacent to forest. The Forest Service’s representatives were unable to produce any evidence to the Committee indicating the existence or the extent of a problem and, in addition, recognised that damage to Forest Service property by animals on adjacent land was negligible. The Committee requested that the Department take powers to introduce that power by affirmative resolution when and if the evidence was available to indicate that there was a problem.

The clause, if approved by the House, will be dormant, and it will be empowered only by affirmative resolution of the House at a later stage. The Department agreed to implement an enabling clause that would allow it the discretion to legislate for the control of animals and for the imposition of attendant fees on

landowners, if and when the situation should arise, as part of its general duty to protect woodland under the duty towards sustainability.

2.30 pm

In light of the Committee’s concerns regarding the powers of the Department to enter private land to control animals on adjacent land, the Department drafted a new clause that is based on a purely consensual approach. That clause requests that the occupier of land adjacent to woodland take effective steps to prevent damage to that adjoining woodland. However, if that fails to happen, the Department may request permission to control the animals, but it has no power to enter woodland without that permission. The clause does not contain any power to impose costs on the adjoining landowner, even if, by agreement, the Department controls any animals on his land. In addition, it allows the Department to retain the ability to protect woodlands from damage by wild animals and addresses the concern expressed by the Committee about the necessity of agreement with landowners.

Finally, I turn to amendment Nos 22 and 23, which propose changes to clause 10. The Committee considered that the Department must clearly define the term “vegetation” and what is meant or implied by the term “uncultivated land” so that adjoining landowners in receipt of departmental grants are not adversely affected by the actions required by Forest Service. The Committee wished to emphasise that negotiation with the landowner to remedy the problem should be the first and best available option. Although the Committee accepted that buffer zones to act as firebreaks were necessary to protect a public investment such as a forest, it expressed the view that creation and maintenance of the fire buffer zones should be an integral part of any management plans for land owned by the Forest Service and should not interfere with private land.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development supports the amendments in the second group.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin supports the amendments in the second group. Without repeating what the Chairperson of the Committee said, I will talk about amendment Nos 22 and 23, which seek to amend clause 10. They deal with protecting woodland from unmanaged vegetation.

I want to mention the creation of buffer zones to protect large areas of forestry. To understand the importance of the issue, we need only consider the number of forest fires in recent weeks and months and the huge damage that has been caused to hectares of habitat throughout the North. It is not unreasonable for the Department to want the Bill to include powers to protect its investment; indeed, it is the taxpayer's investment. The same goes for private woodlands into which people invest huge resources over a long period. Whenever people plant trees for timber production or recreational value, they are investing huge sums of money, sometimes millions of pounds, in that commodity. It is important that everything that can be done to protect that commodity is done, otherwise millions of pounds will be lost.

I will veer off the point slightly and mention the management of gorse or whin, which is an issue that needs to be taken up cross-departmentally with a number of Departments, including DARD, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of the Environment. The Chairperson of the Environment Committee is here today, and I hope that he will look at that. We cannot allow millions of pounds to be continually ploughed into fighting fires when a more appropriate position can be taken.

Sinn Féin supports the amendments in the group.

Mr Elliott: Thankfully, all the amendments stemmed from the Agriculture Committee reeling in the Forest Service's wayward thoughts, and we take some credit for that. However, I thank the Department for listening to the Committee's recommendations and for agreeing with much of our deliberation.

The Committee was keen, through amendment 15, to protect the Irish hare, and the Department was willing to accept the amendment. The Committee felt that the term "at any time" in amendment 17, to which the Minister alluded, was much too broad and gave the Department far too much control and power.

Amendment 19 was a key amendment for the Committee, which felt that it was totally unrealistic that the Department should be allowed to go on to any land adjacent to Forest Service land to control wildlife and charge the local landowner for that privilege. I am much more content with the Department's proposed

new clause 8A, which states: "with permission of occupier".

I was concerned about subsection 8A(3), which states:

"The Department may serve on the occupier of land B a notice".

I was going to ask what would happen if the occupier did not take any action after a notice was served. Thankfully, the Minister clarified that situation in that, I assume, nothing can be done without the landowner's permission.

The Ulster Unionist Party had the introduction of a new forestry Bill in its previous manifesto, so we are pleased that others parties came on board and supported us in establishing legislation that will be helpful to the entire community. We support the amendments in this group.

Dr Farry: It is always good to hear that the Ulster Unionists are ahead of the curve in at least one or two issues. The Alliance Party is largely content with this group of amendments and, indeed, with the vast bulk of the Bill.

I welcome the thrust of the amendments, particularly with regard to nature conservation and the revised approach towards wild animals in forests. However, I was concerned when the Minister referred to that issue as trying to:

"kill two birds with one stone",

and I wondered whether that was consistent with the thrust of the Bill. She will, no doubt, address that when she makes her winding-up speech.

I should, at this point, probably speak on behalf of my party leader on the Irish hare, given that he took a strong interest in that during his tenure in the Assembly. He has now moved on to a different position and does not have the same degree of freedom to engage in discussions on the Floor of the Assembly. It is important that the Irish hare is protected.

We welcome the approach that the Committee and the Department took to the legislation. However, we are disappointed that the Committee for the Environment adopted a different perspective, and it remains to be seen what will be done on the Floor of the Assembly and by the Department of the Environment about those amendments when we discuss the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill.

In so far as the Alliance Party welcomes the Agriculture Minister's commitment, it was, to my knowledge, Members from her party who frustrated the direct protection of the Irish hare when it was discussed by the Committee for the Environment. I ask the Minister to address her party's stance on that issue as well as the formal stance of the Department, because two different approaches are being taken by two Committees and, potentially, by two Departments. I welcome the Minister's warm words, and I note that even the president of Sinn Féin has taken a strong interest in trees. At least we are at one on that.

The Alliance Party is happy with all the amendments in this group and will support them.

Mr Shannon: I support the debate that we have had so far. My colleague the Chairman of the Committee put forward our party's stance on the Bill, and we support the issues.

The Committee shares with the Minister the desire to get a good piece of legislation for the future of forestry in Northern Ireland. That is good news, and it is evident in all the hard work that has been put in thus far. However, with any and every Bill, there are still concerns.

Many of our difficulties and concerns arise from the fact that the legislation has been conceived and drafted by the very people who will be most affected by it. There has been input to the process, and that is good because people have been able to influence the Bill. It is always good to have advice and input from those affected, as would be the case had we been dealing with medicine or education. The difficulty arises where there is conflict between the objectives of the state; in this case, the Assembly, which wants to see a massive increase in the woodland and forestry delivered by the private sector but which is legislating for an industry that is totally dominated by publicly owned forests.

I emphasise the point that unless there is proper separation between the part of the Department that regulates forest operations for everyone, public and private, and the operational side of the publicly owned forest estate, there will be concern that the Department is legislating to suit itself.

Tha Committee kens fien weel that this coanflit heas bin goin oan an haes wrought herd tae secuer changes that brings aboot tha aims o' aw perts o' tha sector.

Aa' think this is a foar better bit o' laa' noo than whun it sterted, but aa' think tha fact that tha Department's intentyins at tha stert wus tae hae poowers tae aloo them tae buy sportin richts tae buy lan an tae gaun untae lan tae shoot - aw wioot tha kinsent oor agreement o' tha lan oaners whau wud be affected demonstrated ther normal feelins an approach

The Committee recognised that conflict and has worked hard to secure changes that balance the needs and aspirations of all parts of the sector. The Bill is a much better piece of legislation now than when it started, but the fact that the Department's initial intention to have powers for the compulsory purchase of sporting rights and land and to go on to land to shoot without the consent or agreement of the landowners affected demonstrates the Department's natural inclinations and approach. With respect, I consider the trait among civil servants to acquire powers of the state over the individual to be a dangerous one that does not sit well with human rights and the rights of the individual to own and enjoy property without interference from the state. The nanny state cannot extend to that, and we must guard against that tendency.

I would go so far as to suggest that we revisit the work of the Forest Service and the effects of this legislation on a regular basis, and I suggest to the Minister that it would be a good idea to do that once in each Assembly mandate, so that we can keep an eye on what happens and ensure that the powers that we have created are not being abused or used against farmers and landowners whose property or business lies in close proximity to Forest Service operations.

We have heard from the public that they want an accountable government, with checks and balances. That is what we hear on every issue. This piece of legislation should be subjected to those very checks and balances, especially when one takes into consideration the daily changing nature of wildlife and forestry.

In particular, the Bill allows for Forest Service staff to go on to private land to control deer. Witness after witness confirmed to the Committee that that power is not required. The Forest Service itself gave figures confirming that it is not an issue at present and that it will not be an issue in the foreseeable future or for at least a decade. Its persistence in seeking the powers provokes unease among some, including

many of the people who have fed their views to me, and I have reflected that in my contribution to this debate.

I have taken this opportunity to record my reservations about that power, and I ask Members to consider how they will defend to their rural constituents a decision that allows government rangers compulsory powers to come on to their farms and fields to shoot deer. That is a concern for many. It is an issue in the constituency that I represent, and I have been approached by several constituents who have asked me to ensure that the matter is well monitored and regulated. I make that comment so that it is recorded in the Official Report and so that departmental officials are also aware of it.

Much about our public forestry operations is to be commended, but there are also some restrictive practices in place that unfairly discriminate against the individual. In particular, I note my concern about restricted access to sporting shooting. Let me put on record that I was pleased that the Minister referred to the value and benefits of sporting shooting when she gave the Bill its initial reading. Obviously, I declare an interest as one who participates in that particular sport.

I also declare an interest as a member of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and of the Countryside Alliance.

2.45 pm

The Minister may be interested to know that the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, which took a major interest in the Bill, has just secured significant Government funding on the UK mainland to establish and support country sports tourism officers, who will help to unlock the value of sports tourism to benefit the whole of the local economy. Northern Ireland lags far behind in opening up public access to shooting opportunities. The Minister and the Committee might liaise on that in the future, as they seek to support our rural and tourism industries in these difficult times. The opportunities for economic growth and sports tourism that will benefit the entire community are there.

There is no doubt that the Bill has been well thought out. However, there is still more to be done. Will the Minister assure me and my constituents that the Bill can change and

deliver protection without adversely affecting landowners' rights? I support Part 2 of the Bill.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I again acknowledge the volume of work that has been done on this Part of the Bill, which is all about the protection of our woodlands — a very important aspect of our stewardship — and our sustainability responsibilities. Inevitably and unfortunately, that, at times, means the control of animals, including deer, which is, as we have just heard, a charged and emotive subject. Some people wish to protect deer; others prefer to shoot them. There you have it.

The control of animals on other land, including private land, is another aspect of the Bill that is highly emotive and smacks of Big Brother and draconian measures. However, that must be put in perspective, and I hope that the positive amendments to the Bill dispel some of the myths out there. I accept that it is one thing, as every farmer knows, to control vermin, but sometimes populations of larger mammals must be controlled to protect trees, crops, vegetables and agricultural land of all purposes.

In the case of deer, expediency and the need for rapid preventative action may mean the occasional close season cull. That is a situation to be avoided if at all possible, but it cannot be ruled out, as is acknowledged in the Wildlife Order 1985, under which there has traditionally been a farmers' defence to control deer in the close season without the need of a licence. In principle, the Bill contains this as a preventative measure to protect our woodlands.

Of course, hares are also protected during their close season. However, again, to prevent damage, particularly to woodland nurseries, culling is sometimes unavoidable. Despite the Deputy Chairperson's assertions and claims that he was responsible, I have made the Irish hare an exception in that provision. I have given, and stand over, my reasons for that. Given the species' uniqueness, I believe that it is the right thing to do. All told, the agreed amendments have limited the power to cull during close seasons and put it into perspective. Crucially, welfare considerations are maintained and no protected animal may be killed, which is very important to me personally and something that I wanted to see in the Bill.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee referred to the proposed compulsory right of entry on to neighbouring land to control animals damaging woodlands. That has also been addressed, and we now have a purely consensual power, which, I hope, will recognise that woodland owners and neighbouring woodland owners often have a common interest in protecting their property. I hope that the checks and balances that Jim Shannon referred to are there. It is prudent, however, to insert the balanced powers that we want now, because they at least afford protection and may be needed during the lifetime of the Bill. Therefore, it is prudent to insert those powers at this stage.

The original clause will remain dormant. It recognises that any marked increase in the deer population will present a threat to the sustainable future of woodlands, particularly the growing of trees in an era of forest expansion. The powers are there to be used, but only with the Assembly's approval, which is a reasonable approach.

Not unconnected is the power to require the removal or destruction of vegetation on private land to remove a potential fire risk. As some Members pointed out, that is a worry at this time of year. Members are familiar with the surge in gorse fires in spring and early summer and the danger that they present to our woodlands. Willie Clarke and others acknowledged that. My Department will work with neighbouring landowners to reach agreeable and more flexible solutions where vegetation has to be dealt with. I have also pledged that any such action will not compromise any agrienvironment payments. I hope that that addresses Members' comments.

Jim Shannon talked about shooting rights and the original proposal to acquire them. That proposal in the forestry strategy was only ever intended as a measure to protect public safety in individual circumstances in which the owner of the shooting rights in a departmental forest exercised them irresponsibly and posed a threat to other users. However, it was decided not to legislate for that, and the proposal was never included in the Forestry Bill.

I hope that my statements put this part of the Bill in perspective. I hope that Members accept that it offers the least level of interference to protect woodlands and does so in a manner that is consistent with wildlife legislation. I thank

Committee members for the time, patience and effort that they have put into developing these clauses, and I trust that Members are content with this group of amendments. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 3.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. We will return to the debate after Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

3.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise the House that questions 1, 6 and 12 have been withdrawn. I call Mrs Naomi Long.

Flooding: East Belfast

2. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the actions taken to alleviate flooding in east Belfast. (AQO 1121/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My officials have been seeking to address the historical flooding in east Belfast. The development of the Connswater Community Greenway project along the Knock, Loop and Connswater rivers has placed pressure on Rivers Agency officials to meet greenway timescales for the delivery of an integrated environmental improvement scheme incorporating flood alleviation works.

Rivers Agency has completed the preparation of all designs and necessary documentation for the flood alleviation works to be integrated with the greenway project. Tendering for the joint contract commenced on 12 April 2010, for return by July 2010. Site works are programmed to commence in autumn 2010. Although Rivers Agency is progressing towards full implementation for all proposed alleviation works within the scope of the greenway project, the quantum is such that, at present, my Department cannot provide all the necessary funding. Consequently, my officials have included flexibility in the contract to reflect the available funding, and they are engaged in ongoing liaison with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) on the matter.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for her answer. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has wide duties with regard to being the competent authority to co-ordinate

flood responses more generally. Due to the interconnected nature of the river network and the drainage and sewerage systems, Roads Service, the Planning Service, Northern Ireland Water and Rivers Agency have to be brought together to look at the wider issues of flooding. Is work still progressing on that? What hope does the Minister have of an outcome on that in the short term?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

There has been a lot of cross-departmental co-operation on the issue. The greenway project is an exemplary project in which we are working in conjunction with the proposed environmental improvement scheme and building in the flood alleviation works. There will be value-for-money considerations in that, and, hopefully, it will address a lot of the issues. In the interim, the risk of flooding to properties will remain as it is until all the proposed flood alleviation works are completed. The agency will be trying to ensure that the water courses in the area are maintained and have optimum capacity to carry flood flows. Rivers Agency and the other responders that the Member mentioned will continue to provide emergency response in the event of heavy rainfall and high river flows.

Lord Browne: In light of the situation experienced in the Clarawood estate in east Belfast last month, when the Housing Executive had to hire contractors to clear a flooded river because Rivers Agency was unable to do it, does the Minister believe that Rivers Agency has the necessary resources to carry out effective maintenance and grill clearance?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

Rivers Agency has a budget, but it is not infinite; there is no doubt about that. We have to spend whatever budget is decided on, and we have to do as much maintenance as we can within that budget. However, it is worth pointing out that if people were to desist from throwing hedge clippings and suchlike over fences and creating a problem, there would be less work for Rivers Agency to do and the work that it does would have better value.

We have been working closely with members of the community to try to resolve that problem and to try to educate them into realising that if a mattress, for instance, is on a riverbank and the river rises, it will sweep away the mattress and block the grill. We can do only so much. If something is thrown into a river in the days after

it has been cleaned and maintained and if there is a flood or a heavy rainfall, there may well be problems for people in the area. There is an issue with education and ensuring that people know that although items might be three, four or five feet away from the river when it is at a low level, heavy rainfall, for instance, will make the river rise, and items can be swept away, and, in doing so, they can block grills and create huge problems for the community who will be under water, in spite of our best efforts.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister give details of the total area of land that is being directly affected by Rivers Agency's improvement schemes? Furthermore, can she estimate the total sum of money that has been paid as a consequence of direct purchase or compensation for inconvenience?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The flood alleviation works in the Connswater project are estimated to cost £15 million, £1.6 million of which is in place this year. Funding beyond that remains uncertain.

I do not have information with me on the wider budget, but I will be happy to respond to the Member in writing if he cares to put the question to me in writing.

Rural Communities: Severe Weather Compensation

3. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any developments in relation to the provision of compensation for potato farmers whose crops were damaged during the winter period. (AQO 1122/10)

5. **Mr Leonard** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department took to assist farmers and rural dwellers during and after the severe weather on 30 March 2010. (AQO 1124/10)

14. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the latest date that growers and farmers affected by the severe frost and extended rainfall can expect payment of compensation from her Department. (AQO 1133/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3, 5 and 14 together.

Following the severe frost damage to potato and vegetable crops in January, I raised the issue at the Executive meeting on 11 February and secured agreement that I would carry out an initial assessment of the damage and then meet the Finance Minister. The initial crop damage assessment has now been completed, and I subsequently met the Finance Minister on 13 April and advised him that, in accordance with EC conditions regarding the classification of losses, the eligible loss amounted to approximately £2.3 million. That would result in a PE requirement of £1 million if a scheme were put in place and payments made.

Since the January frost, heavy snowfall on 30 March resulted in some sheep farmers also suffering significant losses. I took the opportunity to discuss that with the Finance Minister, and we agreed that I should bring both matters back to the Executive. I secured agreement at the Executive meeting on 15 April that a bid for hardship funding would be best considered as part of the June monitoring round. The Executive also agreed that my officials hold discussions with the farming and insurance industries to see whether there are any ways of making insurance more accessible to farmers, as that is the direction that we would like to see the industry follow.

In the meantime, I have asked my officials to consider positively any individual requests for force majeure to avoid losses of less-favoured area (LFA) payments because of lamb or sheep fatalities that have resulted in the farm stocking level falling below the required minimum stocking level density.

In answer to the question about when farmers can expect compensation payments, I must stress that there is no guarantee that funding will be made available for hardship payments. The reason for that is that DARD is facing many millions of pounds of unfunded, inescapable, statutory and contractual pressures, and resources available to the Executive are under severe pressure across the board. In addition to the actions outlined for hardship payments and specifically in response to the severe weather in March, my Department issued practical advice to farmers to help minimise sheep losses in particular. Loughry campus in Cookstown was also made available as one of the designated support shelters for rural dwellers who were left without power.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. The Minister will know that the frost that affected the potato crops began in December 2009. Will she clarify whether the clause for crop insurance in state-aid rules came into effect only in January 2010 and that, therefore, the growers would not have had access to any such crop insurance policy for their crops?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I cannot confirm that at this time, but I will respond to the Member in writing.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister mentioned potato farmers and rural dwellers. What action has she taken to assist sheep farmers who have also been badly affected by the recent severe weather?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have asked officials to consider positively individual requests from sheep farmers for force majeure to avoid losses of LFA payments because of lamb or sheep fatalities resulting from the recent severe weather. Farmers need to set out their particular circumstances in writing and notify the Department within 10 days of being in a position to do so. I understand that 19 farmers have notified Orchard House regarding force majeure considerations in respect of LFA payments. In addition, the Department has issued practical advice to help minimise losses, particularly in regard to ewes with young lambs, and sheep farmers seeking support or advice are encouraged to contact their local DARD development adviser.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have a notion that the Minister's response to my question will be similar to her response to Mr McCallister's question. The Department made reference to compensation for damaged crops, but will the Minister clarify whether insurance is available for crops that were lost or damaged in such circumstances?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: It is prudent to be insured, given that the Executive initially made some hardship payments based on one-off events. We have seen so many such events in the three years of the current Executive. Insurance is necessary, particularly for farmers who were affected by the weather events over the past six months, such

as the heavy rain, the flooding in Fermanagh, the frost and the snow. It is prudent to take out insurance policies on farms to mitigate the loss from such events.

We have been working with the insurers to ascertain whether the insurance that is made available to farmers is affordable. We must accept that the high cost of insurance can work against farmers. It must be affordable, and farmers must have access to the necessary insurance to protect their businesses against such weather events, which, although described as one-offs, seem to be becoming extremely common.

Brucellosis

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions have been taken to deal with brucellosis, particularly in the south Armagh area. (AQO 1123/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Veterinary Service's brucellosis control programme, with the support of farmers, particularly in south Armagh, has enabled us to continue to make significant progress towards the eradication of the disease. The herd incidence is currently at a level of 0.36%, compared with the most recent high of 1.01% in March 2008. Wider-ranging interaction with herd owners, in the form of farmers' meetings and brucellosis liaison groups, has shaped the disease-management decisions that directly affect the farming community in those areas. The disease-control programme, implemented by the Veterinary Service, requires co-operation from herd owners who are subject to measures such as the restriction of movement and the testing of their herds. In addition, the programme requires farmers to accept the potentially difficult circumstances of herd depopulation. The situation was particularly difficult following the incident in which an infected foetus was dumped in the Lislea area. Farmers there have had to bear additional disease-control procedures in the temporary control zone that was set up in the vicinity.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response and for the progress that has been made to date. What can farmers achieve by becoming involved in brucellosis groups and by attending meetings?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The brucellosis meeting that was held earlier this year in Mullaghbawn provided an opportunity to hear the concerns of farmers who had been directly affected by the disease. We heard the concerns expressed on a personal and on a business level. Also, we heard the concerns of a community trying to manage its farms within the constraints that my Department has applied in an attempt to control any further spread of the disease. Those herd owners who had become involved through brucellosis liaison groups can and do have a direct effect on the local management of disease. Divisional veterinary offices seek to work with them on the difficult control measures, such as the restrictions on movements or grazing. In addition, suggestions and ideas from the liaison groups on other aspects of brucellosis control have been taken into account when developing new policies. The liaison groups provide a good example of how partnership between the Department and the farming community works, and they represent an important part of the fight against brucellosis.

Mr Gallagher: I thank the Minister for that information. Earlier this year, she said that the latest DNA science would be used to help to track down those responsible for infecting herds. Will she provide an update on the laboratory tests and outline any progress on that issue?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As the Member knows, the DNA of the foetus has been analysed and compared against 1,800 stored samples. To date, no match has been found that would indicate the parentage of the foetus. However, the comparison of the foetus's DNA with that of further stored samples is ongoing.

At this stage, we have not yet received the results from the genetic analysis that we requested from the US laboratories. Additional samples from selected herds have also been sent, with a request that they be subjected to full genome sequencing, but that is a complicated process that will take some time to complete. It is important to note that we are using all the tools that are available to us to try to extract the parentage of that foetus and establish exactly where it came from.

3.15 pm

Mr Savage: We know that brucellosis is a scourge on many farms in Northern Ireland. Recently, there were press reports of the dumping of an infected foetus on a farm. Has any information been discovered about or action taken against the person who planted that foetus?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Department is still involved in that ongoing investigation. Obviously, the PSNI is also involved. I must say that the community has been very responsive to the need to find out where that foetus came from. There has been an absolute backlash from the community towards the person who put the foetus there. The clear message that came out of our brucellosis meeting in Mullaghbawn was that the community would not tolerate such actions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 was grouped with question 3. Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Egg Producers

7. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance she plans to offer egg producers to help meet the costs associated with the phasing out of conventional cages by 2012. (AQO 1126/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am very appreciative of the current difficulties that egg producers and the poultry sector in general face. Following useful and constructive discussions that I have had with the industry, I have looked widely at all options that would be available under the rural development programme to support modernisation in the poultry sector.

As regards the egg producers in particular, European Council directive 1999/74/EC, which was published in July 1999 and introduced into national legislation in 2002, imposes minimum standards for conditions for laying hens. It is an EU requirement for all egg producers to use alternative or enriched cage production systems by 1 January 2012. I am encouraged that many have already made the necessary changes.

I have considered whether it would be possible to provide funding under a specific measure, such as the EU meeting standards measure, to help egg producers to invest in the conversion to enriched cages. However, the maximum

funding that is permitted under the meeting standards measure would be between around 1.5% and 3% of the total investment needed. As that would be such a small proportion of the total investment, it would not be possible to demonstrate that the funding would make the difference between an investment progressing and not progressing. Therefore, a business case would not succeed. In addition, it would not be possible to provide funding retrospectively to egg producers who have already made the necessary changes.

As we are all aware, resources are extremely limited at present. Any ring-fencing of funding for one sector would have the impact of restricting resources that are available to others. An existing support measure that can be accessed by the poultry industry generally is the farm modernisation programme (FMP), which assists farm businesses to modernise their holdings and improve their production techniques by providing support for plant, machinery and equipment that are selected from a list of eligible items. I have asked that that list be enhanced to include a range of items that will meet the needs of poultry producers.

My Department convened a steering group of interested parties, which included representation from the poultry industry, to review the list of eligible equipment from FMP tranche 1 and to develop a list of eligible items for tranche 2.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her response. Given the large expense that egg producers will incur, does the Minister agree that any aid under the farm modernisation scheme would be small and derisory compared with the overall cost of changing to that system?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I agree. I have sought and looked at every mechanism that is available to us to try to find a way to help that sector. I accept all the arguments that its representatives made at our meetings. I have a great deal of sympathy for the sector. The Member is correct: the cost is so great that any help that the Department could give under EU laws would be derisory. Unfortunately, that is the hand that I have been dealt. There is no scope for me to change that, which is why I have looked at other ways to try to militate against it and to ensure that items that the sector can access are available under FMP

Mr K Robinson: I realise that the Minister must deal with a complex problem. However, does she accept that her approach to the farm modernisation scheme has automatically cut off many egg producers from attaining even minimal funding to assist in converting their cages because they do not live in less-favoured areas?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As Members are aware, I am keen that the current tranche of FMP should target disadvantage by focusing on businesses in less-favoured areas, where need for modernisation is great.

The LFAs, particularly the severely disadvantaged areas (SDA), are dominated by small farms. The gap in average farm business size between those farms and those in lowland areas has widened over the past 20 years. Farmers in those areas face a permanent hardship as a result of the poor agricultural conditions that they face.

Sustaining agricultural activity in LFAs will be difficult without targeted support of various kinds, and that is why there are scores for applicants from SDAs and disadvantaged areas (DA) to enable those who are successful to use the grant to help them remain or become competitive while working in a challenging environment. Those farms are on the margins of viability, and I am sure that the Member will share my view that we must do all that we can to ensure that farming communities in such harsh environments are not lost. Given the nature of it, I recognise that some poultry producers may not be able to access the grant. However, I have looked at other areas where they can get on to that funding ladder, for example, e-communication, the young farmers and the modernisation bands should help. I have also lowered the ceiling from £5,000 to £4,000 to enable more farmers can get on to the farm modernisation programme so that we can spread it wider and so that more farmers can benefit from the scheme. I hope that many people in the poultry sector will be able to access the grant.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Britain has been able to offer higher funding to its poultry sector. If the same European rules apply, is it not possible to do that here?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am sorry to correct the Member, but it is the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Dublin that has provided funding of €16 million for its poultry sector. That funding is part of a package arising from the CAP health check agreement, which included additional funding for the South through increased compulsory modulation rates. Similar additional funding is not available to the North or to Britain, and neither Scotland, England nor Wales have provided funding for their poultry sector. However, the Member highlights the differential between farmers North and South and the difficulty that our farmers have in remaining competitive.

Animal Health and Welfare Strategy

8. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the progress made on the all-island animal health and welfare strategy. (AQO 1127/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am absolutely delighted that the all-island animal health and welfare strategy was agreed at the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting that took place at the end of March 2010. The strategy has been one of my key ministerial priorities since I came into office almost three years ago. I take this opportunity to thank my ministerial colleagues in the Executive and in the South for their support in agreeing the strategy.

The all-island animal health and welfare strategy is designed to optimise the animal health status of the island through the alignment of policies to control animal disease. Full co-operation on animal health issues has the potential to help to reduce and prevent the spread of animal disease and to facilitate trade. The ultimate objective of the strategy is the development of policies that facilitate free movement of animals on the island. Under the strategy, I have already secured a number of positive outcomes, such as broad alignment of border control policies that are aimed at preventing the introduction of animal disease, as well as co-operation on contingency planning for exotic disease outbreaks, including agreement on a common chapter in the contingency plans for foot-and-mouth disease, avian influenza and, most recently, bluetongue.

On 12 April, I co-hosted with Minister Brendan Smith a very successful event for animal health and welfare stakeholders from across the island to discuss the roll-out of the strategy, and I was delighted that the new EU Commissioner John Dalli was a keynote speaker at the event.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response. Will she outline what has been achieved from co-operation on an all-Ireland basis?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: There have been a number of very positive outcomes already as a result of North/South co-operation on animal health and welfare, including: the development of a largely similar system of sheep ID; co-operation on the exchange of data to facilitate trade in bovine animals following the lifting of the BSE export ban; broad alignment of border control policies that are aimed at preventing the introduction of animal disease; co-operation on contingency planning for epizootic diseases; agreement of a protocol on welfare during transport breaches; and co-operation on testing regimes for TB and brucellosis in border areas.

As we go forward, the all-island strategic approach will enable the achievement of further positive outcomes, all of which will help to contribute towards the key aim of the free movement of animals.

We will continue with our fortress-Ireland approach to protect the whole island from the threat of serious animal diseases. We hope that we will gain EU recognition of freedom from Aujeszky's disease throughout the whole island at an early stage. We continue to take steps to reduce brucellosis in the North. There is a wide range of areas, and I believe strongly that, under the all-island animal health and welfare strategy, together with the goodwill of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the European Commission, we can achieve the free movement of animals and unlock significant benefits for farmers and the wider agricultural industry.

Mr Shannon: I welcome the Minister's response, and it is good to know that progress is being made. The dioxin scare is a clear example of where the all-Ireland aspect was not deemed important enough by certain parts of the Republic of Ireland and the relevant Department there. Will you assure the Assembly today that, under the all-Ireland animal health and welfare

strategy, Northern Ireland farmers and the produce business are totally protected? In the past, they have had every reason to believe that they have not been.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member will recognise, as many people in the farming industry do, that I have done everything that I can to protect our farmers, to work on their behalf and to campaign tirelessly for them to ensure that they have a better standard of living and remain in farming. I do not think that my record of delivery for farmers needs to be questioned in this Chamber.

Mr Elliott: My question follows on from that asked by Mr Shannon. Will the Minister accept that the dioxin incident, which originated in the Republic of Ireland, was a disaster for North/South, all-island animal health co-operation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I accept that it might have had the potential to be a disaster had it not been for the very quick response in getting full co-operation on all those matters and better communication at every level between the Departments. The incident has brought the two Departments closer together, and there is now far more co-operation as a result. An early warning system has been put in place, and there really has been an awful lot more communication and co-operation between the Departments since then. I welcome all that; it can only benefit our farmers.

Farm Modernisation Programme

9. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to identify additional funding for the farm modernisation scheme. (AQO 1128/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My officials have recently commissioned a midterm evaluation of the rural development programme, which will provide an opportunity to look at allocations and spending under each of its schemes. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation will feed into any decisions that I may make subsequently to amend the content or financing in the programme. However, in the current economic climate, departmental spending on the programme will be subject to the same scrutiny as the rest of my Department's spending plans.

Finally, both farming unions are being consulted on an equality screening exercise on the FMP. The equality screening template is now out to consultation with a range of section 75 groups and industry stakeholders, and I recently decided to extend the consultation period deadline by one week from 5 May to 12 May to allow further time for responses to be received.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that answer. Given the large number of applications that were made in the first tranche, when only between 10% and 15% of farmers received assistance, will the Minister agree that more resources need to be put into the fund? That figure is a good indicator that a large number of farmers will apply for the scheme.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I agree entirely with the Member. I have asked for additional funds, and, if any money is going spare, Sammy Wilson is well aware that I would love a few more million pounds to be put into the pot. The Member is right: not only did many farmers apply for tranche one of the scheme but many applications are expected for tranche two. That is why we had to come up with better selection criteria to benefit the people who are most disadvantaged.

We also need to remind ourselves that not only is this a good grant for farmers but they are putting in 60% of their own money also. They are investing in the rural community and in rural businesses, many of which manufacture the items on the list of those that are eligible. It will be a win-win situation for all of us if we can get more money into the programme. However, we are constrained by budgetary pressures. I would love to put more money into the FMP, which is a great scheme.

3.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 15 to 27 and amendment No 32, which amendments were:

No 15: In page 4, line 15, leave out “wild animals” and insert

“deer or hares (other than Irish hares)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 16: In page 4, line 17, leave out from “either” to “purposes” in line 18 and insert “forest”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 17: In page 4, line 20, leave out “at any time, kill, take or destroy any wild animals”.

and insert

“take, kill or destroy any deer or hares (other than Irish hares)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 18: In page 4, line 24, leave out subsection (4). — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 19: After clause 8 insert

“Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest

8A. – (1) In this section –

‘land A’ means any land falling within section 8(2);

‘land B’ means any land –

(a) which adjoins land A; or

(b) any part of which is within 500 metres of any part of land A.

(2) The following provisions apply where the Department is satisfied that trees growing on land A are being, or are likely to be, damaged by wild animals present on land B.

(3) The Department may serve on the occupier of land B a notice –

(a) stating that trees growing on land A are being, or are likely to be, damaged by wild animals present on land B; and

(b) requesting that the occupier –

(i) take effective steps, within 3 months of the date of the service of the notice, to prevent the damage; or

(ii) grant permission for an authorised person to enter land B and exercise the powers conferred by subsection (4).

(4) An authorised person may with the permission of the occupier take, kill or destroy any wild animals on land B.

(5) If land A or land B is unoccupied, subsections (3) and (4) apply with the substitution of references to the owner of that land for references to the occupier.

(6) In this section ‘wild animal’ means any animal which is living wild and is likely to damage trees, other than –

(a) a bird;

(b) the Irish hare;

(c) an animal for the time being included in Schedule 5 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (NI 2).” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 20: In clause 9, page 5, line 14, leave out subsection (8) and insert

“(8) Where the occupier of land A is not the Department, any costs incurred by the Department in connection with an authorised person taking action under subsection (7) are recoverable as a civil debt from the occupier of land A.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 21: In clause 9, page 5, line 19, leave out “section 8” and insert

“section (Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 22: In clause 10, page 5, Line 27, leave out paragraph (b) and insert

“(b) requesting that, within 30 days from the date of service of the notice –

(i) any vegetation growing on the part of the land within a distance of 15 metres from the boundary of the forest be removed or destroyed; or

(ii) such other measures as are specified in the notice be taken in relation to that vegetation for the purposes of reducing the risk of the forest being damaged by fire.” — [The Minister

of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 23: In clause 10, page 5, line 33, at end insert

“or take such other measures in relation to that vegetation as the Department considers appropriate for the purposes of reducing the risk of the forest being damaged by fire.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 24: In clause 11, page 5, line 39, leave out “section 7 or 7A” and insert

“section 7(1)(a) or 7A(1)(a)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 25: In clause 11, page 5, line 41, leave out “Article 10(1) or (2) or 19(1), (2)”

and insert

“Article 19(1)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 26: In clause 11, page 6, line 3, after “8(3)” insert

“, (Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)(4)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 27: In clause 11, page 6, line 4, after “section” insert

“(Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)(3) or”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 32: In clause 38, page 19, line 21, at end insert

“() No order may be made under subsection (1) in relation to any provision of section 9 unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment Nos 15 to 18 have already been debated.

Question, That amendment No 15 be made, put and agreed to.

Amendment No 16 made: In page 4, line 17, leave out from “either” to “purposes” in line 18 and insert “forest”. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

Amendment No 17 made: In page 4, line 20, leave out

“at any time, kill, take or destroy any wild animals”

and insert

“take, kill or destroy any deer or hares (other than Irish hares)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that amendment No 18 is consequential to amendment No 15, which has already been made.

Amendment No 18 made: In page 4, line 24, leave out subsection (4). — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 19 made: After clause 8 insert

“Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest

8A. – (1) In this section –

‘land A’ means any land falling within section 8(2);

‘land B’ means any land –

(a) which adjoins land A; or

(b) any part of which is within 500 metres of any part of land A.

(2) The following provisions apply where the Department is satisfied that trees growing on land A are being, or are likely to be, damaged by wild animals present on land B.

(3) The Department may serve on the occupier of land B a notice –

(a) stating that trees growing on land A are being, or are likely to be, damaged by wild animals present on land B; and

(b) requesting that the occupier –

(i) take effective steps, within 3 months of the date of the service of the notice, to prevent the damage; or

(ii) grant permission for an authorised person to enter land B and exercise the powers conferred by subsection (4).

(4) An authorised person may with the permission of the occupier take, kill or destroy any wild animals on land B.

(5) If land A or land B is unoccupied, subsections (3) and (4) apply with the substitution of references to the owner of that land for references to the occupier.

(6) *In this section 'wild animal' means any animal which is living wild and is likely to damage trees, other than –*

(a) *a bird;*

(b) *the Irish hare;*

(c) *an animal for the time being included in Schedule 5 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (NI 2). — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Control of animals on land adjacent to forest)

Amendment No 20 made: In page 5, line 14, leave out subsection (8) and insert:

“(8) Where the occupier of land A is not the Department, any costs incurred by the Department in connection with an authorised person taking action under subsection (7) are recoverable as a civil debt from the occupier of land A.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 21 has already been debated. I remind Members that amendment No 21 is consequential to amendment No 19, which has already been made.

Amendment No 21 made: In page 5, line 19, leave out “section 8” and insert

“section (Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10 (Removal or destruction of vegetation on adjoining land)

Amendment No 22 made: In page 5, line 27, leave out paragraph (b) and insert

“(b) requesting that, within 30 days from the date of service of the notice —

(i) any vegetation growing on the part of the land within a distance of 15 metres from the boundary of the forest be removed or destroyed; or

(ii) such other measures as are specified in the notice be taken in relation to that vegetation for the purposes of reducing the risk of the forest being damaged by fire.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Amendment No 23 made: In page 5, line 33, at end insert

“or take such other measures in relation to that vegetation as the Department considers appropriate for the purposes of reducing the risk of the forest being damaged by fire.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 10, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 (Protection for persons acting under section 8, 9 or 10)

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 24 has already been debated. I remind Members that amendment No 24 is consequential to amendment No 17, which has already been made.

Amendment No 24 made: In page 5, line 39, leave out “section 7 or 7A” and insert “section 7(1)(a) or 7A(1)(a)”. — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 25 has already been debated. I remind Members that amendment No 25 is consequential to amendment No 17, which has already been made.

Amendment No 25 made: In page 5, line 41, leave out “Article 10(1) or (2) or 19(1), (2)” and insert

“Article 19(1)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 26 has already been debated. I remind Members that amendment No 26 is consequential to amendment No 19, which has already been made.

Amendment No 26 made: In page 6, line 3, after “8(3)” insert

“, (Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)(4)”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 27 has already been debated. I remind Members that amendment No 27 is consequential to amendment No 19, which has already been made.

Amendment No 27 made: In page 6, line 4, after “section” insert

“(Control (with permission of occupier) of animals on land adjacent to forest)(3) or”. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 12 and 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. The lead amendment in the group is amendment No 28, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 29 to 31. Those amendments deal with felling licences, fees for such licences and the protection of ancient or long-established woodland.

Clause 14 (Requirement of licence for felling)

Dr Farry: I beg to move amendment No 28: In page 8, line 13, leave out from the first “a” to the end of line 14 and insert “the Department”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 29: In clause 17, page 10, line 13, at end insert

“() In determining the felling management plan for any land which consists of, or includes, ancient woodland, the Department shall have regard to the desirability of maintaining the special character of that woodland.” — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

No 30: In amendment No 29, at end insert

“and ensure that there is no net loss of area of any ancient or long-established woodland” — [Dr Farry.]

No 31: In clause 34, page 18, line 7, after “14” insert “or 20” — *[The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]*

Dr Farry: At the outset, I want to say that the Alliance Party welcomes the legislation and the fact that it has now reached Consideration Stage. Moreover, we acknowledge the work and dialogue between the Department and the Committee, and we feel that the Bill is a very good one. The purpose of our amendments is simply to transform a very good Bill into an excellent one. Our amendments are in no way a strong criticism of the process; indeed, we welcome what has happened and are simply trying to improve things further.

Jim Shannon made reference earlier to a potential review of the legislation during the next Assembly mandate and the one after. Although we may be encouraged at that possibility, we must bear in mind that there has been a 56-year gap between the current legislation and the previous Act. Therefore, it may be some time

before we have another opportunity, and it is important that we take the opportunity today to make the Bill as strong and robust as possible.

There are two themes that I want to address in relation to our amendments and part of the wider group of amendments, and they are interrelated. The first theme is exemptions in relation to felling licences. We feel that what has been proposed takes away any obligation for any UK or Northern Ireland government Department to apply for a licence. We accept that DARD should, naturally, be exempt because, as I understand it, Forest Service is not formally recognised in legislation, and, therefore, any legislative duty or obligation and any exemption will fall on the Department. Clearly, the Department cannot regulate itself. That is illogical and inconsistent, and, therefore, we concede that DARD should be exempt. However, that principle should not be extended to every other devolved Department and, indeed, those at a UK-wide level.

We need to be careful how we manage and conserve our existing woodland, particularly sensitive areas. I am led to believe that a significant amount of our woodland is under government ownership. I accept that DARD may own the vast majority of that, but there will be circumstances in which other Departments have woodland under their guardianship, and it is important that we have a proper system of governance and a proper system of checks and balances in place to ensure that there is no arbitrary loss of woodland as a result of that process of challenge.

That reflects wider problems that I and my party feel we have in Northern Ireland — an absence of environmental governance. Indeed, to our deep regret, we do not have an independent environmental protection agency. There is no independent check and challenge. I appreciate that, with respect to felling licences, we are not quite in the same league of independence. Nevertheless, there needs to be some process for other Departments, and that is the purpose of amendment No 28.

Amendment No 30 relates to ancient woodland. We recognise and welcome the fact that the concept of ancient woodland will be included in legislation. That is important, and I understand that the meaning of “ancient woodland” is woodland that pre-dates 1830. That is, perhaps, an arbitrary date but, nonetheless, we have a

definition. Ancient woodland is very scarce in Northern Ireland. Only 6% of Northern Ireland is forested, compared with 12% in the UK, 10% in the Republic of Ireland and the very high level of 44% in Europe, which is, no doubt, helped by some of the Nordic countries. Only about 0.6% of our woodland falls under the definition of ancient woodland, compared with 2% in the UK as a whole. Therefore, we are proportionally worse off even than the rest of the UK in respect of ancient woodland. There needs to be a very strong presumption against felling when it comes to ancient woodland.

3.45 pm

Although we recognise that the Department has gone some way to address that matter with its own amendment, our amendment takes it a step further and puts in place a presumption against felling so that we do not see the loss of that ancient woodland. That is important, because ancient woodland is very much part of our society's character and history, not to mention the environmental importance of protecting trees.

When we talk about ancient woodland, we should also bear it in mind that we are not just talking about woods or forestation. We could be talking about individual trees, which, in some circumstances, could be situated in the most vulnerable types of ancient woodland. There are individual trees located on the property of other Departments and, as other plans are taken forward for development, they may be particularly vulnerable to felling. That reinforces the argument that we are making about putting in place proper safeguards, as well as a very heavy presumption against the felling of any ancient trees.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Paisley Jnr): At long last, we are starting to see the wood from the trees and are reaching the conclusion of a very lengthy but helpful debate. A total of 32 amendments to the Bill have been tabled, 27 of which came from the Minister and were agreed at Committee Stage. That demonstrates a pursuit of excellence, which has been down to the diligent and hefty work of the Committee and its work in conjunction with the Bill team to get the legislation right. That work was done so that people will look back in 50 years and say that the legislation was forward-looking, that it worked, that it was broad, that it did all the

things that it was supposed to do and that it was good that the Assembly passed it. Surely, that is what the Assembly and the Committee should be about: making legislation that is appropriate and effective for the people of this country.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development supports the amendments tabled and detailed by the Minister. However, the Committee cannot support the amendments tabled by Dr Farry, because they are neither practical nor achievable. I recommend that he and his colleague Mr McCarthy take the opportunity to read the report that the Committee produced, which addressed the issues and points that he raised. We did not ignore the points that he raised; we looked at them.

In the first instance, amendment No 28 would force other government Departments to ask for felling licences if they wished to fell trees. There was much debate on whether the Department and other government bodies should be exempt. The Department's legal advice indicated that the Department was exercising a regulatory function and that the principle was that government Departments did not regulate one another or need regulation because of their nature and the functions that they perform. In addition, in legal terms, government Departments are Crown bodies and, from a constitutional perspective, are indivisible. In legal terms, that means that government Departments that seek a felling licence from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development would be equivalent to individuals seeking permission or a licence from themselves. The Committee was content for the Department to encourage good forestry practice on the part of other Departments and government bodies. Therefore, as I said, the measures in amendment No 28 are neither practical nor achievable. Although it might have been a nice experiment for lawyers, Dr Farry's amendment would render the Bill ineffective and, instead of making it better, would make it worse. That is why it should be opposed.

The Committee totally appreciates the desire to further protect our ancient woodlands, as outlined in amendment No 30. However, the presumption that there should be no felling or net loss in those woodlands whatsoever is not workable or practical, and experts who work the woodlands agree. The Committee accepted that there will occasionally be a need to manage ancient woodlands, which may

include felling dangerous or storm-damaged trees. Indeed, such practices help to protect and maintain those prized assets. The felling management plan, which will be completed by the Department, will indicate the restocking levels; however, as I said, there cannot be a guarantee that a net loss will not occur. We support amendment Nos 29 and 31, but we oppose amendment Nos 28 and 30.

I re-emphasise my gratitude to our support teams, in particular the Committee Clerk and his team and the Bill team, which worked closely with the Committee. We had some very useful exchanges. Indeed, a gentleman called Mr Morwood, who came to the Committee regularly, will go down in the annals as an appropriately named person. The stakeholders also deserve praise. There were good discussions, negotiations and debate among Committee members, and I pay tribute to them from the Dispatch Box for their hard work. We have improved the legislation and made it relevant. We have proved that the Assembly works for ordinary men and women and that it does not create legislation for the sake of it but rather to improve Northern Ireland. I recommend amendment Nos 29 and 31 and oppose amendment Nos 28 and 30.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Committee Clerk and Committee officials for their work. I also thank the departmental officials for their response to the various debates and the issues that were raised during the scrutiny of the Bill. The Committee gelled well in its scrutiny, and we have made the legislation better. That augurs well for the future. Committee members from the various parties raised different issues; those issues were dealt with, and the Department and the Minister responded to them.

It is unfortunate that extra amendments have been tabled at this late stage. The Alliance Party was previously not represented on the Committee but, latterly, Kieran McCarthy was appointed to it. It is unfortunate that the documentation of the issues that the Committee had already dealt with was not read. Anyone who had read it would have realised that there was clear debate on the issues that the Alliance Party raises in its amendments.

As the Chairperson said, we support amendment Nos 29 and 31 and oppose amendment Nos 28 and 30 because the latter would force other

Departments to go through a ritual, which is what it would become, of applying to the Agriculture Department for felling licences. That would mean that one Department would be asking another Department for a licence to fell a tree. We expect that there is enough scrutiny, common sense and good regulation in the various Departments for that not to happen and, therefore, there is no need for the amendment. Indeed, no one would expect the Department to have to ask itself for a licence. Furthermore, one Department should not regulate another. Therefore, that amendment is not advisable even along legal lines; it is unnecessary and bureaucratic, and we should try to avoid it. The Assembly's scrutiny Committees have shown reasonableness and started to deal with issues by streamlining and cutting out bureaucracy rather than by adding to it.

As regards amendment No 30, the Committee accepted that there will be occasional circumstances in which felling in ancient woodland will have to happen. That, as the Chairperson said, is often done for the protection of those woodlands, as well as to deal with some of the dangerous trees that have to be felled. There is a strategy to restock that woodland and ensure that there is no loss in the long term. We cannot replant ancient trees, but we can look to the future and plan for future generations. Amendment Nos 28 and 30 are unnecessary, and we will oppose them.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew):

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. This has been a worthwhile debate, and we have produced decent legislation as a result. The Chairman of the Committee talked about how we worked together in the pursuit of excellence and in a spirit of co-operation. I welcome that analysis, which sums up the work that we have done together to bring this legislation forward. I hope that it can become the template for the two further pieces of legislation that we plan to introduce during this term. We can get so much more done in a spirit of co-operation.

I intend to oppose the non-ministerial amendment No 28, which would remove the exemption of other Departments from the requirement of a felling licence under clause 14. The feeling around the Chamber is that Members will do the same. As Members are no doubt aware, there is a principle that government Departments do not regulate one another because of the nature of

the functions that they perform and general government obligations. As the Chairperson of the Committee said, Departments are ultimately indivisible from a constitutional point of view. I cannot see how one Department would apply —

Mr Elliott: There is a way around that, which is to have an independent felling licensing or management planning body. However, that would cost a lot more money as well as being another quango — a body that we do not need. It would be a cost not only to the Department but to the private forestry interests. That was one of the reasons why we did not accept that proposal.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I take the Member's point. I remind him that in a few weeks' time we could be looking at the massive cuts that the Tories are proposing. I do not think that we can afford what we have got, never mind anything additional.

It would not necessarily be the case that one Department would regulate another. The same principle applies to enforcement action. The Committee accepted that realistic position, which still remains pertinent. Therefore, I urge Members to oppose amendment No 28.

I should, perhaps, provide a little preliminary background on amendment No 29, which relates to the part of the Bill that deals with felling licences. Our long-term aim is to increase the woodland area and to ensure that it is sustainably managed. To enable us to do that, the Bill will introduce a felling licensing system that will allow us to safeguard the area under forestry and require owners to regenerate their woodland in line with sustainable forest management criteria.

Felling licences are a common feature of forestry legislation in England, Scotland and Wales and in the rest of Ireland. Amendment No 29 was tabled in response to concerns expressed by the Committee and stakeholders about the importance of protecting ancient woodland, even to the extent of having a presumption against felling in the part of the Bill that deals with felling licences. I am also committed to sustaining our ancient woodlands; that is part of the general duty under the Bill to sustainable forestry. It has always been our intention to protect ancient woodland by means of felling management plans to regulate the regeneration of ancient woodland sites.

Members should bear it in mind that felling licences are only one part of the equation; appropriate regeneration is the other part. It must be recognised that, even with ancient woodland, some level of woodland management, which can include some felling, will always be appropriate or necessary. Nevertheless, to make the intention of the Bill clear, I am happy to agree an amendment that will make it crystal clear that, in the case of ancient woodland, any felling management plan shall have regard to the desirability of maintaining the special character of that woodland.

I believe it to be an important and positive amendment, and I acknowledge the input of the Committee and stakeholders in adding that new condition to felling-management plans.

4.00 pm

The non-ministerial amendment No 30 seeks to enlarge upon amendment No 29, which already makes a strong case for ensuring that any felling-management plan takes into account the special character of ancient woodland. I should make it clear that felling plans are as much about appropriate regeneration as felling. They are felling and regeneration plans; one cannot exist without the other. Both sides of the equation have to be taken into account lest there be any misunderstanding. If that essential point is grasped, there is no need to fear net loss or any other type of loss of ancient or long-established woodland. I am entirely satisfied that amendment No 29 will ensure the necessary protection to our ancient woodlands. My Department is already obliged to give special recognition to ancient and long-established woodlands through the felling-licence process. The proposed amendment is entirely unnecessary, so I do not think that there is any need for Members to support it.

Amendment No 31 also relates to the felling of trees and to the scope given in clause 20 for the Department to charge fees in respect of felling licences. The amendment is in response to strong concerns raised by the Committee and stakeholders who viewed fees as a disincentive to landowners who might contemplate entering forestry. Furthermore, they viewed it as a potentially unfair competitive disadvantage in that fees are not imposed for felling licences in the rest of Ireland or in England, Scotland or Wales.

The original provision to give scope for fees was discretionary, and it was consistent with

Government and my Department's policy on cost recovery. I have decided to waive fees, given the purpose and undoubted public benefits of felling licences. However, I believe that the clause should be retained to enable fees to be applied in future if circumstances change or if the Tories get in. In light of the Committee's concerns, I have agreed that should it be the intention following review to introduce fees in the future, there will be discussion with the Committee and the provisions will be subject to agreement by the Assembly under affirmative resolution. I am satisfied that that is a fair and balanced solution that acknowledges contemporary circumstances as we embark upon a new felling regime in an era in which we are aspiring to creatively and realistically encourage forest expansion. I acknowledge the input of the Committee and stakeholders in that pragmatic settlement.

The debate is encouraging, because it shows without doubt the level of lively and passionate interest that there is in our woodlands. The Part of the Bill that covers the regulation of felling is absolutely integral to the sustainability duty. We all recognise that sustainable use of resources is a compelling imperative. We should not be in any doubt that, when we talk about felling and its licensing, regeneration is another part of that equation. That is part and parcel of felling-management plans, the purpose of which is to help Government to oversee the appropriate regeneration of our woodlands in line with the best forestry management standards. We will work with woodland owners and will not tie them up with unnecessary red tape so that we have a spirit of co-operation in an era when we want to attract landowners to forestry, not alienate them from it. That will be essential if we are to achieve our targets, and it is supported by the waiving of licensing fees.

I have also given strong and sincere assurances in opposition to the Alliance Party's amendment that those same felling-management plans are there for all woodlands, especially our ancient woodlands. That commitment is reinforced by my amendment proposing that the special character of ancient woodlands be taken into account in such plans.

There has been some discussion, flowing from the amendment tabled by Dr Stephen Farry and Kieran McCarthy, about whether other Departments should be exempt from licensing. In relation to the specifics of individual trees, I clarify that the purpose of this Part of the Bill is

to protect ancient woodlands. Tree protection orders (TPO) are operated by DOE and apply to smaller groups of trees that would not be classified as woodland. They can be effective in providing additional protection in urban areas, but that is not what the Forestry Bill is about. I hope that I have addressed Members' concerns and that they support the sound logic of my argument in the face of what is otherwise a practical and legal difficulty. I hope that we can move to complete the Bill in the same spirit of co-operation that we have had to date. Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Dr Farry: The debate was largely constructive, and the Alliance Party will push its amendments to a vote. I realise that it will probably be ourselves, and perhaps our colleagues in the Green Party, who stand up for the poor trees. Even though we have now joined the Executive, we delight in bringing the other four parties in the Executive together on such matters, and it is always encouraging to see consensus in the Chamber.

I reject the notion that we are being bad sports in tabling these amendments at the eleventh hour. That is part and parcel of Consideration Stage. There was no Alliance member on the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development until my good friend Kieran McCarthy joined a couple of weeks ago. He is not quite sure what he did in a past life.

We are fully aware of the Committee's detailed discussions on the issue and with the Department, and we respect that work and the detail of the report. As the Chairperson of the Committee said, there were debates on those issues, and debates have, by their nature, different shades of opinion. We take the view of trying to strengthen the legislation, whereas the other parties want to go with the legislation at this stage. That is fine; that is the process.

Even if we had had a member on the Committee, it is still perfectly in order for a party that is represented on a Committee to bring forward amendments individually or with other parties at Consideration Stage. I welcome the fact that we are discussing legislation more frequently, rather than simply discussing private Members' motions that have no impact or that do not go anywhere. We are doing what we were elected to do, and we make no apologies for having such debates.

We recognise that the Department is taking steps to strengthen the legislation in both

the areas that concern us. We simply want to take things a little bit further. We note the concept of the desirability of maintaining the special character of woodland. However, that is desirability, and it implies that there can be other factors that have to be weighed up in the balance when decisions are being taken. That is why we think the wording could be a bit stronger.

Other Departments do not, by definition, have a particular responsibility for woodland and forests. They have their own responsibilities, and they may, from their perspective, wish to pursue other objectives. Woodland issues may well be secondary considerations. In contrast, I would like to think that DARD has put the interests of our woodland first and foremost. That process of communication between Departments, and the checks and balances, is of some weight.

Members spoke about Departments not being able legally to regulate each other. There are examples of Departments regulating each other. Departments make planning applications, for example, and are regulated under the auspices of a different Department. If Departments were going ahead with their own planning applications under their own auspices without the need for the checks and balances of a planning system, we would quite obviously see an impact on people's quality of life. They would be acting from their own perspective, which they should be doing, and not from the wider perspective that comes with the checks and balances of a planning system. There is merit in Departments being checked by someone else. The circumstances in which that happens may be few and far between. However, an important principle is at stake, and it is important that a mechanism is in place.

We are not suggesting that there are no circumstances in which an ancient tree or set of trees should be removed. There will be extreme circumstances when that happens, hence the term "net loss". However, the presumption needs to be heavily skewed against removing trees; it is not simply a case of the desirability of not removing them. There needs to be a very high bar.

We will put our amendments to a vote, and if people in future years or generations return to the issue, the record will show that there was some debate on those aspects of the Bill, and

other Members may wish to pick up on those in the future.

That said, my party thinks that the Forestry Bill is a substantive piece of legislation. We recognise the considerable efforts that the Department and the Committee have made. We think that the Bill is a good basis on which to proceed. We were simply trying to improve it in a number of ways to make it an excellent Bill.

Question, That amendment No 28 be made, put and negatived.

Clause 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 15 and 16 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 17 (Operation and conditions of felling licence)

Amendment No 29 proposed: In page 10, line 13, at end insert

"() In determining the felling management plan for any land which consists of, or includes, ancient woodland, the Department shall have regard to the desirability of maintaining the special character of that woodland." — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: An amendment has been tabled to amendment No 29. Therefore, I call Dr Farry to move amendment No 30.

Amendment No 30 proposed: In amendment No 29, at end insert

"and ensure that there is no net loss of area of any ancient or long-established woodland". — [Dr Farry.]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 30 is an amendment to amendment No 29, so I will put the Question on amendment No 30 first.

Question put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 29 be made, put and agreed to.

Clause 17, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 18 to 33 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 34 (Regulations)

Amendment No 31 made: In page 18, line 7, after "14" insert "or 20". — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 34, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 35 to 37 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 38 (Commencement)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: With your indulgence Mr Speaker, I add my thanks to my officials who have worked very hard on the Bill, and I am pleased that it is nearing its conclusion.

Amendment No 32 made: In page 19, line 21, at end insert

"() No order may be made under subsection (1) in relation to any provision of section 9 unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly." — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Clause 38, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 39 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

4.15 pm

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

Private Members' Business

Quangos and Arm's-length Bodies of Government Departments

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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Molloy: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to review the roles and functions of quangos and arm's-length bodies of government Departments to ensure that there is accountability and value for money.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to move a motion to ensure that quangos and arm's-length bodies are accountable to, and provide value for money for, the Assembly and the Executive.

What are we talking about? What if the public body concerned is not part of the government? That is the problem, and that is what we must stop and change. Such bodies must be made accountable. At present, they are one step removed from government, but to whom they are accountable is sometimes not too clear. We must make quangos and arm's-length bodies accountable and responsive.

We also need to look at Executive agencies, which are excluded from the directory that lists arm's-length bodies. Agencies that have been formed in various Departments must be made accountable. Non-departmental public bodies (NDPB) fall into different categories such as Executive NDPBs, advisory NDPBs and tribunal NDPBs. In March 2009, there were 78 public bodies. We must look at Executive agencies, which are formed when a Minister sets up his or her own agency in a Department. Those agencies are accountable to that Minister.

Ministers also appoint members to those bodies, often a mix of the great and the good, who seem to rotate around various government agencies. They often seem to be appointed

because their faces fit, while other people's faces are unacceptable. There appears to be a pool of people who sit on one quango or another and then move around other public bodies. It does not matter how unaccountable they are, who they are, or how much they have been criticised or held to account for their failure to deliver, they always seem to turn up in another position.

Certain parties get more of a turn at appointments than their share of support demands. However, I acknowledge the change that has occurred from the time when the Northern Ireland Office favoured people who could not otherwise get elected and tried to insert them into quangos. In the Assembly's first mandate, we found that direct rule Ministers, particularly the Secretary of State, appointed a number of such people to public bodies, in which they have remained for a long time without being accountable to the Assembly.

We must look at all those bodies, how their members are appointed, the pool of people from which those members are drawn, and how people get into that pool in the first place to be in a position to be appointed.

The big issue is to wipe out quangoland completely and make it accountable to the Assembly. That was OK when there was direct rule and Ministers flew here one day a week and rubber-stamped what quangos and Departments put forward. That has changed. The make-up of government here and how it is run also have to change.

Under the review of public administration (RPA), we were to get a complete review of quangos; their powers were to be relocated to local and central government. I declare an interest as a local councillor. More powers should be given to local government. Elections are held every four years, so those bodies are accountable; they have to put forward rates budgets so that they are accountable for the money that they spend. The public will respond very quickly to that. We need to look at the role of local government in the future because that role is unclear at present.

Unfortunately, it now looks as though the RPA will not come into operation. That is because of various factors, and ministerial intervention in that process has led to boundaries being an obstacle to the RPA moving forward. We need to remember that the gerrymandering of boundaries in the first place led to the collapse of local government and the Stormont regime. Under direct rule, a new structure of government

was put in place to move away from that, and quangos were put in place to do the job. More and more powers were given to quangos.

On 10 December 2001, the Programme for Government committed the Assembly to a review of public administration by spring 2002. That review never happened. It was said that we would have a different structure under devolution, but that did not happen either. The direct rule quangos were given more powers and functions. Research and Library Services have provided a useful document by Morison stating that the idea of depoliticising government was pursued by removing political or constitutional issues from representatives who may have been elected to local councils or regional Assemblies and giving them to quangos, which were supposed to be at arm's length and non-political.

Morison also said that quangos were potentially more democratic. That leaves a question about how they came about. The people who appointed those quangos might have believed them to be more democratic, because the Northern Ireland Office appointed people whom it liked or with whom it curried favour. Therefore, no accountability was necessary. We need to move to a new situation.

Executive agencies are another issue, as different agencies in Departments have become like arm's-length bodies. One of the issues that got my back up recently was the Roads Service response to the recent severe weather. The various agencies responded differently; they did not work collectively to put together a structure, and there was no flexibility in responding to local needs. Correspondence was needed, but nobody stepped out of the line to meet local needs. The simple answer was that they had their programmes; they had responded in the same way for years and they would not change. One hundred and one reasons were given for doing nothing and not one was given for how something could be done.

During that time, Northern Ireland Water did not respond to breakages and pumping problems; it would not even deliver water to areas if the roads were not gritted. That was particularly the case in rural areas.

Roads Service said that it was not responsible for gritting the road, so it was not gritted and the water service would not deliver. Indeed, as far as the water service was concerned, if the

road did not appear on its computer screen somewhere in Belfast, that road did not exist.

We need to find a way to make bodies accountable, and, to allow us to bring ministerial control back and allow the Ministers to respond, the motion affords us an opportunity to review the structures that govern quangos. The Assembly will then be able to hold Ministers responsible, and they will not be able to take the line that they are acting according to regulations. If a Minister hides behind legislation to avoid doing something, we need to change that legislation. This is a legislative Assembly, and its role, when necessary, is to change legislation.

To make arm's-length bodies, agencies in Departments and quangos accountable to Ministers, we need to change legislation so that Ministers can come here to be questioned by Members about their respective roles. In that regard, I congratulate the Minister for Regional Development, who took action recently on Northern Ireland Water. That showed that Ministers can hold bodies to account and bring them back into line. Ministers can take back power and change situations. Therefore, I hope that the Assembly will take back power.

We have changed the structure of government here from a situation involving direct rule and quangos to one in which the Assembly is accountable to the public and Ministers are accountable to the Assembly. Ministers must take back the power to make decisions, for which the Assembly can then hold them accountable.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Molloy: Let us cut out the middle tier of bureaucracy and bring ministerial control back to the Assembly.

Mr Ross: The fact that many MLAs are not in the Building does not reflect on the seriousness of the issue. Indeed, I am sure that many of those on the doorsteps this afternoon will be hearing the public's frustration about the number of quangos and arm's-length bodies, what they are for and whether we are getting value for money from them.

The issue is a favourite with the tabloids. I do not want to be the human embodiment of the 'Daily Mail', but we might consider the figure of £170 billion that has been spent on

quangos across the United Kingdom since the Labour Party came into Government, including, for example, £6.5 million that the British Potato Council spent on promoting spuds. Passenger Focus spends £5.3 million a year to give rail passengers a voice. Those are the sort of examples that really irritate the public, particularly when people find out that five times more money is spent on quangos than on the Ministry of Defence budget. At a time when our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq are not getting the equipment that they need, that sort of thing leads to anger.

It is not sustainable to continue feeding public money to bodies, which, in many cases, simply duplicate work that could be done elsewhere. Some individuals who sit on two or three funded groups are making a lot of money from those groups. They are paid thousands of pounds for perhaps only three or four days of work a month. In the current economic climate, that is unsustainable.

In the Northern Ireland context, just under £10 billion of public expenditure has been spent on public bodies. For a country this size, that is a very high figure. My research papers include a quote from the Alliance Member Mr Kieran McCarthy, who said that he had been "gobsmacked" by that amount of money and that it was a "major scandal". I agree. The cynic in me finds that slightly surprising given that, over the years, the Alliance Party has done so well out of quangos, which is a point that was made in the opening comments. Nevertheless, Mr McCarthy's point about the impact on front line services was well made.

That said, for balance, it is important to say that some arm's-length bodies and quangos play an important and useful role. Indeed, as a member of the new Justice Committee, I recognise that, in recent weeks, a number of arm's-length bodies have come under the Assembly's control, and the Committee has received briefings on them. For example, the police, criminal justice authority, the Police Ombudsman, the Law Commission and the Policing Board are now under our control. They fulfil a role and serve a purpose that the public recognises.

4.30 pm

We can point to other bodies in the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, such as the boards, which play an important role. We can

look also at Translink. I think that Northern Ireland Water was mentioned earlier as one of the Go-co agencies. It is one example of an area in which we could see lots of changes being made. It has not been a very good example. Those are the sorts of bodies that could be looked at.

The Assembly has discussed and identified other areas where money is not being used efficiently. We have had debates in the Chamber on the Civic Forum. The motion proposes that bodies and quangos such as the Civic Forum, which do not provide value for money, should be looked at. The Civic Forum sat and did not come up with any proposals of note, and none of its recommendations has been implemented. It is a challenge to those on the other side of the House that we must look for efficiency savings in some of those arm's-length bodies and quangos.

Some of the North/South structures should also be looked at. It is interesting to note that some of the North/South bodies were the first areas that the Irish Republic's Government looked at when they were looking for efficiency savings in government structures. They looked at whether they were getting value for money and whether business on a North/South axis could be carried out more efficiently without such expensive bodies.

The amount of money that is spent on quangos and arm's-length bodies is in particularly sharp focus. Over the past couple of days, we have heard a lot about the comments that David Cameron made at the weekend. He said that £200 million could be slashed immediately from the Northern Ireland Budget. That sort of thing brings into focus the areas in which our money is being spent and whether it is being spent wisely.

As a party, the DUP is committed to slimming down government, and we have said consistently that we want to see fewer of these unelected quangos, we want to slim down the Executive and have fewer Departments, and we want to see a reduction in the number of Members. We have been a driving force in the review of public administration process. This morning, I spoke on the Local Government (Finance) Bill.

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

Mr Ross: We also hope to see a reduction in the number of councils. It is important that all Ministers take this issue seriously. If they

sponsor any arm's-length bodies, it is important that they look to see whether those bodies are serving a purpose and whether they will give greater value for money. I support the motion.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for tabling the motion. I declare an interest as a member of Fermanagh District Council. I do not know whether that declaration is necessary or whether the council can be called an arm's-length body or a quango, but I feel that they all come under the overall review of public administration, through which we have been trying to reduce the number of bodies.

It is ironic that the motion comes from the party to my right, Sinn Féin, because it has been trying to establish the education and skills authority. It could be one of the biggest quangos that we will ever see in the Province and one that may prove disastrous — just like the Minister who is trying to implement it. The establishment of the education and skills authority would be disastrous for the people of the Province, especially the children and the parents of young children, for whom it would be absolutely scandalous. It has moved far beyond what it was originally envisaged to do.

Mr Molloy: Does the Member accept that the establishment of the education and skills authority would mean that several bodies that have been in place for many years, with no change, would be removed and replaced by one body?

Mr Elliott: That would be the case, if it were to be brought forward in the way that was originally envisaged. That is the point that I was trying to make. The Minister has tried to change that body, beyond all recognition, from the one that was envisaged by many Members, and that is one of the huge difficulties with it.

Another huge failure in this society has been the Human Rights Commission. Elected people here should be taking decisions, but the bill of rights cultivated by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is a fine example of a failed project which is a proven disaster and on which millions have been squandered. Its failure is blatantly evident in the refusal of the Northern Ireland Office to endorse the Human Rights Commission's political pet project. It is universally recognised that the commission went far beyond its original mandate. The bill of rights has, ultimately, been a failure and a political whim of some of the commissioners. That is a

profound disservice to the people of Northern Ireland. Not only has it been an exceptionally costly exercise, but the commission has attempted to hoard power by undermining the responsibility and authority of locally elected politicians.

I heard the last two Members say that elected representatives here should make the decisions. I agree with that, but clearly, in many circles, politicians are afraid to take the hard decisions, and they farm issues out to quangos to do it for them, which almost exonerates them of their elected responsibility.

Local government reform has been ongoing for some time, and it seemed that we were getting close to some arrangement, although it was not agreed by everybody. However, it is now doomed to failure, at a cost of millions of pounds to the population of Northern Ireland.

I support the motion in principle, but our Province's history of dealing with such issues has not been good. If we are going to progress the issue, we must do so with vigour and authority and actually deal with quangos. Let us shift them on instead of creating new quangos that will try to take away responsibility from elected representatives.

Dr Farry: First, I declare an interest as a member of the Community Relations Council, but I stress that it is an unpaid post. No doubt Members will want to refer, implicitly or explicitly, to the urban legend that the Alliance Party is somehow particularly dependent on quangos for current and former members. I must stress that that is a myth, and it has been perpetuated by our political opponents over the years. Any proper analysis of the figures will confirm that there is no such bias in that respect.

We are more than happy to support the motion calling for a review of quangos, but we have some concerns about the implications of the debate and about the comments that some Members have made. We want to see some sense of balance in this. There is a role for quangos, which is a very pejorative term in our politics, between the Executive and Departments and the community. That relates to the delivery of services and the conduct of particular functions.

The whole drift in modern policy-making in government organisations is very focused at departmental level on policy-making and the

support functions around that, but delivery is farmed out to other bodies that can specialise in that. Our system of government and governance in Northern Ireland tends to reflect that model. I would be wary if we were talking about taking functions that are conducted by quangos back into core Departments. That would be very unwieldy, and it would open up a whole new set of problems.

On the other hand, there may be a temptation to farm those functions out to local government, particularly in the context of moving to 11 councils under the RPA. However, in some respects, that might be counterproductive because a number of the functions that we are talking about that are performed by quangos are best conducted at a single Northern Ireland level. We should not delude ourselves about how small Northern Ireland is in the policy-making and service-delivery world. Northern Ireland is big geographically, and we are all familiar with that, compared to the situation in England and Wales and further afield. However, the provision of services on the basis of 1.7 or 1.8 million people is not terribly unusual. Therefore, a little perspective is required on that.

Similarly, if we are to go down the line of rationalisation, that may be a motivation for some in terms of saving costs. However, I would caution against seeing a review of quangos as part of a wider drive in tackling waste in government, as a bottomless pit that can produce constant savings for us and help avoid difficult decisions on public expenditure. The fact that the sums do not add up is not, in itself, a reason not to make an effort, but let us not feed any unrealistic expectations.

That said, there is also a case for rationalisation based on better service delivery. When quangos or the division of functions between quangos are regarded as arbitrary, consideration should be given to whether a merger of quangos or, in some cases, their abolition may produce much more rounded results.

It is tempting to provide a list of good quangos and a list of bad quangos. We could pat on the head the first list, of which we approve and which the public regard as doing a good job, and we could all give a good kicking to the second list of bad quangos because we do not like them. However, that is another arbitrary distinction, and it is not such a black-and-white issue. Some popular quangos perform poorly,

whereas others that are negatively perceived perform pretty well. The picture is, therefore, neither straightforward nor simple.

There is no reason not to conduct a review as part of the general process of good financial management, and we are happy to support the motion.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Most reasonable people would welcome the measures that are being taken to address the devastating results of allowing a sector as powerful as banking to operate virtually without regulation. Many who feel that those measures are not extensive enough will recognise that they are, at least, first steps in the right direction.

The public reaction is not only to the abuses of power and privilege in the financial sector. Society wants to see the root-and-branch reform of all aspects of public life. That desire is fuelled, to some extent, by the parliamentary scandals. However, a recurring theme, one that is at the heart of the motion, is the existence of quangos, their proliferation and the disclosures about the salaries and additional payments made to those appointed to them.

People must be satisfied that the process is objective, fair and transparent. Some measures have been taken in that direction, but they are insufficient to achieve their intended purpose. I would not argue that it is possible to step back from the application of that particular form of management in all circumstances. However, I have substantial reservations about the quantity of quangos, and I wonder whether, in many instances, they represent a dereliction of duty on the part of those who are elected or are full-time public servants in this region.

If the Assembly and the Executive were seen to address the issue, they would inject a measure of public confidence. The matter need not primarily be addressed as a cost-saving exercise, but it would have the beneficial impact of saving money. It would demonstrate that there is accountability and that the buck stops here with the Executive and the Assembly. There has been an emergence of agreed political structures, and we have demonstrated that a durable, sustainable and robust form of government is being delivered. Now we must follow through in other aspects of public service.

The general perception of quangos is negative, irrespective of the good work that some do or the vital service that others provide. People's view is that quangos appear to mushroom during the good times. However, when there is an economic decline, rather than reducing the number of quangos, the Government turn to front line services in health, education and welfare payments as the first option for making spending cuts.

Mr Ross: Does the Member agree with me and, indeed, the Irish Government that some of the North/South bodies are among those that could be considered on the basis of whether they provide value for money in seeking to make savings? Does he also agree that there may be a better way in which to do business on a North/South basis than through those expensive bodies?

4.45 pm

Mr McLaughlin: I agree with the Member to an extent, although not entirely. I do not believe that anything should be ring-fenced and excluded from examination. I am convinced that North/South bodies are mutually beneficial; however, I respect the fact that that is not the opinion of every Member. I share many Members' belief that none of those bodies should be free from the most rigorous scrutiny and accountability. I would be confident enough to look at whether those bodies offer value for money and show demonstrable mutual benefit.

Since the Member has given me the opportunity, I want to refer to an issue that was raised by Tom Elliott. I find the attitude to the education and skills authority inexplicable and unconscionable. The establishment of the ESA would release many millions of pounds that could be used and are absolutely necessary in the education sector. If there are problems, it is not beyond the genius of Members and their parties to find solutions. Rather than looking for problems, we should look for solutions. We have a ludicrous situation in which people complain about the duplication of the work of two bodies that supposedly address the same issue. Well, those people have created the problem. They should have facilitated the Minister in replacing the wasteful bureaucracy of the tier of education and library boards with the single education and skills authority. At a stroke, that would have released many millions of pounds.

The RPA is another example, although I will not go into that. However, it is another example of politically motivated interference that holds up reforms that would expedite service delivery and defend our limited budget.

Nine point eight billion pounds is tied up in quangos. Although not all that money could be released, I can say this much: if we reduced the number of quangos, we would not have to worry about the cost of water services and the measures that the Minister of Finance must address. There is far too much bureaucracy; it is another tier of government. Many quangos could disappear and nobody would miss them; service would be as good without them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to respond to the debate.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I am eating a sweet, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will try to get rid of it. I expected Mr McLaughlin to speak for a while longer.

I thank Members for their contributions, even though it is late in the afternoon and I should be out canvassing in East Antrim. I have been detained in the House until now. Nevertheless, an important issue is being discussed. There is a public perception that non-governmental agencies, or quangos, are too numerous and are not properly accountable, and that was borne out in Members' assertions.

Before I deal with issues that Members raised, I want to put the matter in context: there are 74 public bodies in Northern Ireland, which employ about 115,000 people. As Mr Farry said, many of them have traditionally been a means of delivering services. Indeed, even if those bodies did not exist, the work would still have to be done, and, even if they were done away with, the money would still have to be spent; it would simply be governed differently.

Members' points fall into three categories: first, appointments to bodies; secondly, the bodies' accountability; and, thirdly, another common theme was what is being done to review the number of bodies.

I will deal first with appointments to bodies because that brought criticism from a number of parties. In fact, the only party to defend the appointments system was the Alliance Party, oddly enough. Mr Farry gave a stout defence. In fact, he may have protested a little too much

in favour of appointments to public bodies. Members will be aware of the old game show 'Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?' The Alliance Party has its own version: "Who Wants To Be a Quango Chair?" Quite a lot of its party leaders won that game on a number of occasions. However, Mr Farry has not been fortunate on that front.

I will go through the appointments procedure. Responsibility for the appointment of board members lies with individual Ministers and their Departments. Although I am responding to the debate, that aspect does not lie primarily with my Department, other than for the bodies that are under its control. Although arrangements may have been looser in the past, appointments must now comply with the code of practice issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The overall responsibility for policy on public appointments is a matter for OFMDFM, which produces a report on all public appointments made under that code on an annual basis. There are 1,200 such appointments made to public bodies in Northern Ireland, and that does not include the new Department of Justice, which has about a dozen of those bodies under its control.

Dr Farry: Twenty nine.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Twenty nine. Thank you very much. The Member is always a mine of information when it comes to such things.

Remuneration is an issue that has been raised on a number of occasions, especially with regard to the position of chairman. The remuneration of board members is a matter for individual Departments and Ministers, and it varies from nothing, in some cases, to quite substantial sums.

Mr McLaughlin: If I had had time, I would have made this important point. A Sunday paper used the Freedom of Information Act to establish some of the levels of remuneration. I will not abuse the privilege of the House to name names, but the chairperson of Invest NI gets £40,000 a year plus expenses for working four days a month. Is that the type of remuneration that the Minister is concerned about?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Others have been raised as well. Although there is always the desire to attract the best individuals, some levels of remuneration are difficult to

justify. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why some of the quangos have been regarded as sinecures for a small circle of individuals, as Mr Molloy described them.

That brings me to the second point, which is about accountability. Quangos are not insulated from accountability. There are opportunities for Committees and Members to raise concerns with Ministers, since it is the responsibility of Ministers to decide on appointments and remuneration, and the House should be used to raise those concerns.

I will continue with the second point, which relates to accountability and guidance for quangos. There was some confusion, and I think that it was Mr Molloy who talked about the fact that, very often, people were dissatisfied with Executive agencies. The whole point is that Executive agencies are part of central government and have the same accountability arrangements in place as Departments. Indeed, on many occasions, quite rightly, questions have been asked in the House about those Executive agencies, and that is the way in which concerns should be raised.

With regard to the guidance issued to public bodies on this matter, it is my Department's role to ensure that the ground rules for the administration of public money are set. There are a number of things that are done with regard to arm's-length bodies. 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland' sets out the accountability and governance principles with which public sector organisations must comply when dealing with public resources. That publication has an annex for arm's-length bodies, "Model Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MS/FM)". That provides Departments with a template that sets out a clear framework for the strategic control between Departments and their bodies. It covers a range of issues, such as operational performance, financing, accountability and control, and it sets out the conditions under which government funds are provided.

The bodies must then make a clear statement of the accountability arrangements, their governance requirements and the requirements for arm's-length bodies to ensure that value for money is achieved. When that is agreed against all the requirements of the MS/FM, all bodies will be monitored by their sponsoring Department to ensure that individual Ministers

have put in place appropriate arrangements between them and the arm's-length bodies to determine the terms and conditions of the MS/FM for the individual bodies. The importance of that document and that arrangement is that oversight cannot be overstated, and it is for that reason that my Department has the overall approval role when signing off those individual MS/FMs.

In addition to the guidance for managing public money, my Department issues guidance on a range of governance-related topics that are relevant to public bodies. That includes 'Public Bodies: A Guide for NI Departments', which is designed to provide additional guidance for Departments involved in establishing and sponsoring public bodies. The Department of Finance and Personnel also provides guidance on issues such as risk management. It produces the 'Audit Committee Handbook' and regularly gives additional guidance through "Dear accounting officer" and "Dear finance director" letters.

It is the responsibility of each Department to ensure that all relevant matters that are drawn to its attention are shared with public bodies under its sponsorship. All DFP guidance reinforces the accountability links between individual Ministers and Departments and the boards and executive staff of arm's-length bodies. Some Members have suggested that arrangements are not in place for accountability, but I hope that I have illustrated that at least measures are set in place not only for setting the standards but for monitoring and reviewing them and for ensuring that Ministers apply them.

Many Members raised the review of arm's-length bodies. It is important that we continually review arm's-length bodies. The following example about a certain body illustrates the point, and I know that is not regarded as an arm's-length body. It is one thing for Members to say what they have said during the debate, but implementing that is another matter. I had a salutary experience in my former role as Minister of the Environment, and I am looking at some of the culprits for that, who are in the Chamber. I can see the Member for Lagan Valley Mr Lunn smiling because he knows what I am going to say. After three fairly damning reports on the Road Safety Council were published, I decided that the Department would no longer fund it. A vast sum of money was not involved; it was only £160,000. I finished up being hauled

before the Committee for the Environment twice, having three debates in the Assembly and receiving questions at nearly every Question Time for six months.

It is good to have a high-level debate such as this and to talk about the need to review arm's-length bodies. However, once that starts, every person will crawl out of the woodwork to say how wonderful, valuable, important and indispensable they are. Inevitably, plenty of Members will say that they did not mean that arm's-length body and that they meant another one.

Let us be warned of that when we talk about reviewing arm's-length bodies.

5.00 pm

Nevertheless, we have taken a number of measures, such as the review of public administration. Mr McLaughlin and Mr Elliott referred to the ESA. I am not against finding some way of concentrating the way in which we administer the delivery of services in the education sector, although I think that, if we are going to replace what we have, it must be replaced with something better that takes into consideration the sensitivities of the education sector and the various providers within that sector. That is where the issue has arisen, and the Minister of Education bears some responsibility for dealing with that, along with others.

Under the review of public administration we have already looked at a number of public bodies. For example, the two phases of the restructuring and streamlining of health and social services have now been completed. Overall, the number of health and social services bodies has been reduced from 38 to 17, and the number of trusts has been reduced from 19 to six. Therefore, we have already started doing some streamlining. In addition, we are moving towards reducing the number of councils from 26 to 11, and we hope that that aim will be fulfilled.

In addition, in April 2009 the Assembly agreed to an efficiency panel review to examine the number and organisation of Departments and the implications of the RPA to ensure that the departmental structure is best organised for the delivery of public services in an efficient manner. That is ongoing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister draw his remarks to a close?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will.

Other work to review the number of public bodies is ongoing. That is something that we have to look at continually. Some minor bodies could disappear without a great deal of reorganisation, whereas other changes will take much more reorganisation. Such reorganisation is an important issue in getting the best use of the public purse, and we should keep it under review. I thank the Members for raising the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to please switch off their mobile phones and BlackBerries, as they interfere with the recording equipment.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It falls to me to conclude the debate on behalf of the proposers of the motion: Francie Molloy, Mitchel McLaughlin and me. I thank each of the Members who contributed to the debate, which, I think everyone will agree, was an important and necessary debate on the roles and functions of quangos and arm's-length bodies, principally from the point of view of achieving greater accountability and ensuring value for money.

I welcome the fact that there has been unanimous support for the motion, and I thank the Minister of Finance and Personnel for attending today's discussion, despite the fact that he would prefer to have been in East Antrim. This is a ruse that we have used on a number of occasions to prevent the Minister from being in East Antrim, because the margin between he and Oliver McMullan is closing by the day. We will, therefore, be tabling more motions of this character in support of Mr McMullan's candidature in that area.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I am aware that over 80% of the functions of that Department are devolved to arm's-length bodies. When I was briefed on the roles and remits of that Department, that is the first thing that was brought to my attention by the then permanent secretary, Mr Sweeney. Speaking in a party political capacity, all one has to do is remember the debacle of the Northern Ireland Events Company, a company limited by guarantee but which also came under the responsibility of the Department. When we discuss the very existence of arm's-length bodies, the way in which they function and are

managed can sometimes be as interesting as their very existence.

The outcome of the debacle involving that arm's-length body, if it can be called that, was that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure adopted a number of the Committee's recommendations regarding the management of its arm's-length bodies. Those included recommendations that a departmental observer should attend all meetings relating to arm's-length bodies; an individual who joins the board of an arm's-length body should undertake the relevant mandatory training within six months; and that a skills audit should be performed across all board members of arm's-length bodies under the aegis of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to establish members' financial and governance skills.

The Minister said that government in a different way will still cost money, and he is right. He enumerated the appointments in the system, saying that it now exceeds 1,200. Mitchel McLaughlin said that the chair of an arm's-length body receives £40,000 per annum plus expenses in remuneration for a few days' effort a week. The Minister spoke about appointments and the whole business of accountability. He said that the Department of Finance and Personnel has issued guidance notes on financial accountability. He also said that all bodies are monitored from a value-for-money perspective and that they must make a clear statement on accountability arrangements. All of that is welcome; it is what we want. However, the wider review of quangos and arm's-length bodies remains of the utmost importance.

Francie Molloy emphasised the number of agencies within Departments. He cited the example of DRD's Roads Service and NI Water not working effectively together to address the problems caused by the freezing conditions during the winter, when NI Water faced the challenge of delivering water to households in rural areas where the roads were not gritted. Mr Molloy said that there are too many agencies in DRD and other Departments. He said that there was a lack of clarity about the number and remit of public bodies and executive agencies. He also said that the great and the good were regularly appointed, as if there is a pool of quango servers, which the NIO has certainly drawn on. He also referred to quango land and commented on the review of public administration being uncertain at this time.

Alastair Ross suggested that it is not sustainable to continue to feed public money into all public bodies and agencies at current levels. He said that arm's-length bodies carry out some useful and important functions and that they cannot, therefore, be ruled out per se. If arm's-length bodies deliver, they deliver, and that should be recognised. He cited the Civic Forum as a bad example. However, I believe that we must examine that issue, because it is important that we hear the voice of civic society. The challenge for the Assembly is to ensure that democracy is participatory and that the voice of civic society is heard in some format. However, we should certainly learn from the lessons of the Civic Forum.

Mr Ross said that his party was the driving force behind the review of public administration. However, some Members believe that that party is, in fact, holding it up. He also said that the North/South is one area where bodies could be axed. However, I take a contrary view. Given that there are two systems of everything on this small island of six million people, a North/South approach not only makes sense but saves money. One can approach the subject from that perspective as well. If Members were to talk to the people in border communities about GP out-of-hours access, they would see that there is a lot of scope for the expansion of North/South bodies in the spirit of accountability and making best use of public resources.

Tom Elliott had an interesting exchange with Francie Molloy about the education and skills authority. He lambasted the Human Rights Commission, which was, perhaps, predictable.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That is fair enough.

Mr McElduff: OK. He said that politicians were afraid to take responsibility and make decisions.

Stephen Farry declared an interest and conceded that he is a member of the Community Relations Council. He almost pleaded guilty in respect of the myth that the Alliance Party did not benefit unduly or disproportionately from such appointments in the past. Trevor Lunn will, obviously, agree with that, but others will continue to question it. Stephen said that he supports the review, but wants a sense of balance in the debate because some arm's-length bodies have merit, deliver services in an efficient way and, at times, specialise.

Mitchel McLaughlin reminded us that the banking sector is unregulated and that reining in the banks is a job and a half. He also mentioned the proliferation of bodies and said that some salaries are on the high side for not a very large amount of work. He had reservations about the number of such roles and asked whether it is sometimes a dereliction of duty on the part of Ministers and public servants to rely extensively on delivery by arm's-length bodies. He engaged in a discussion about the merit of North/South bodies and said that, although nothing should be excluded from rigorous scrutiny or review, North/South bodies may come out favourably. He challenged some Members' attitude to the education and skills authority. He felt that it is an effective use of public resources to release millions of pounds to establish one overarching body, rather than creating too many lesser bodies under its aegis.

In conclusion, I thank the Members who participated in the debate and hope that we can pass the motion unanimously.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to review the roles and functions of quangos and arm's-length bodies of government Departments to ensure that there is accountability and value for money.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes to speak and that all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Donaldson: I welcome the opportunity to lead this afternoon's debate on the future of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital. At the outset, I pay tribute to the staff at Lagan Valley Hospital, particularly those who work in maternity services: the consultants and the medical staff who lead the obstetric service that is a fundamental part of the maternity service in the hospital, the midwives, the nursing staff, and others who are involved in providing a very high standard of service to the local community.

Lagan Valley Hospital's maternity service has a very good reputation, and, in recent years, it has consistently delivered a birth rate of more than 1,000 a year. In fact, the birth rate there is higher than that at the Mater Hospital in Belfast, which has, potentially, a larger catchment area. The maternity service at Lagan Valley Hospital offers a safe environment for expectant mothers. That is evidenced by the fact that the hospital has the lowest rate of Caesarean births in Northern Ireland and is well below the UK average for such births. That is a clear indication that the service provided at Lagan Valley Hospital is safe and has a very strong reputation in the community. It also shows that those who are involved in providing that service operate to the highest professional standards.

5.15 pm

For several years, there has been a debate about the nature of the service provided for the community in the Lisburn area. In response to a departmental document on the modernisation of hospital services in Northern Ireland, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust proposed the withdrawal of consultant-led obstetrics services at Lagan Valley Hospital

over a period of time. The initial proposal was for the replacement of that service by a midwifery-led maternity service at Lagan Valley Hospital. Lisburn City Council and the community in Lisburn led a campaign to retain maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital. Their preferred option was the retention of the consultant-led inpatient obstetrics service. However, the trust came down in favour of the maternity service becoming midwifery-led.

Recently, the Minister announced that there would be a review of maternity services which would focus particularly on the Belfast metropolitan area. Once again, that has raised a question about the intentions of the South Eastern Trust and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for the provision of maternity services in the Belfast metropolitan area. The city of Lisburn has a growing population and a large number of young families. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that the demand for maternity services in the Lisburn area has reduced. Consequently, I and my colleagues from the Lagan Valley constituency contend that there is a continuing need for an inpatient maternity service at Lagan Valley Hospital.

Therefore, we are anxious to hear from the Minister this afternoon about the review of maternity services that he has initiated and what that might mean for future maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital. In particular, we are anxious to hear whether there is sufficient capacity in the other maternity hospitals, including the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital in Belfast, the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald, which is part of the South Eastern Trust, and Craigavon Area Hospital, which is based in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. We would like to know the Minister's view on whether those hospitals are capable of coping with the additional births that would be allocated to them in the event of a withdrawal of the consultant-led obstetrics service from Lagan Valley Hospital. We would also like to know the implications of the review for the configuration of maternity services in the Belfast metropolitan area.

There have also been discussions between the various trusts — the South Eastern Trust and the Belfast Trust in particular — about maternity services and the implications of withdrawing the obstetrics service from Lagan Valley Hospital. Again, I would welcome clarification from the Minister on the progress that has been made in the discussions between the trusts. Is he

able to provide us with any information about those discussions, and will he indicate the likely timescale for any proposed transfer of obstetrics services from the maternity unit at Lagan Valley Hospital to other maternity units?

Of major concern to myself and my colleagues is the idea that a gap could be created between the transfer of consultant-led inpatient obstetrics services from Lagan Valley Hospital to other maternity units and the creation of a midwifery-led maternity service at Lagan Valley Hospital. That was the experience in Downpatrick. As the Minister will know, after the maternity hospital in Downpatrick was closed, there was a gap until the opening of a midwifery-led maternity service in the new Downe Hospital. We in Lisburn are anxious that that should not happen with the Lagan Valley Hospital. If the Lagan Valley's obstetric service is to be transferred, we seek a firm assurance from the Minister today that there will not be a gap between that transfer and the creation of the new midwifery-led maternity service. It is our view — one that is shared by the Royal College of Midwives — that there should be a seamless maternity service at the Lagan Valley Hospital. Any transfer should be smooth. If obstetrics is to be removed from the hospital, it should not happen until a midwifery-led unit is firmly in place and properly resourced. There is concern about a gap being opened up.

There is talk that the trust, in seeking to create further efficiencies, is considering not proceeding with the creation of a midwifery-led maternity service at the Lagan Valley Hospital and, instead, downgrading the maternity service to an outpatient service. I want to put it on record that such a proposal would be entirely unacceptable to the community in Lisburn. That community conducted a hard-fought campaign, which included a petition to preserve maternity services at the Lagan Valley that was signed by thousands of local people. There would be anger in the community if the trust removed the proposal to retain inpatient maternity services at the Lagan Valley Hospital and opted instead for an outpatient service. In effect, that would mean that there would be no further births at the Lagan Valley Hospital.

The trend in other places is to move away from the centralisation of maternity services. It has been tried in England, but the authorities there are beginning to move back to the provision of local maternity services in local community

hospitals. Indeed, the Department of Health, in its document about developing better services, talked about the concept of community hospitals. We are looking at healthcare provision for a lifetime, but a local community hospital that does not provide an inpatient maternity service is hardly a community hospital worthy of the name.

I would welcome an assurance and a commitment from the Minister today that he and the trust will uphold their previous undertaking that inpatient maternity services will be retained at the Lagan Valley Hospital. If that is to be in the form of a midwifery-led maternity service, we would welcome a commitment to that effect. We want an assurance that the review that is now under way will not result in a complete withdrawal of inpatient maternity services from the Lagan Valley Hospital. It is essential that the South Eastern Trust not be allowed to precipitate the closure of the consultant-led obstetric service at the Lagan Valley Hospital, at least until a replacement inpatient maternity service is in place. We would welcome an assurance from the Minister that that will not happen.

We want a seamless transition. If we are to lose the obstetrics service from Lagan Valley Hospital, which is not what the community desires, we need a firm commitment that the midwifery-led maternity service will be put in place and that, until it is put in place, there will be no precipitate closure of the inpatient maternity unit at the hospital. I look forward to hearing what other colleagues have to say this afternoon. I especially look forward to receiving the assurances that we seek from the Minister on a subject that is very important to the people whom we represent.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt sa díospóireacht. I thank Jeffrey Donaldson for securing the Adjournment debate. As he said at the outset, the standard of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital is excellent. That is reflected in the fact that the rate of Caesarean sections in the hospital is the lowest in the North of Ireland. The hospital also has excellent midwives.

Mr Donaldson said that there were concerns about the proposed transfer from a consultant-led service to a midwife-led unit. I take some of my lead from the Royal College of Midwives, which has some concerns about whether such a transfer would be seamless. There is good

evidence to support those concerns. Several years ago, the hospital in Downpatrick was promised a midwife-led unit, but that never happened. In Belfast, the Jubilee Maternity Hospital merged with the Royal Maternity Hospital, and, as the Royal College of Midwives would attest, women were giving birth in cramped conditions there, which is not what we would expect in this part of the world in this century.

We do not want a similar situation to occur at Lagan Valley Hospital. I know that the Minister asked the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to come up with a business case and an implementation plan to carry the transition forward so that mothers in the greater Lisburn area could avail themselves of the hospital's services. As Mr Donaldson said, there are approximately 1,200 births a year in Lagan Valley Hospital, more than half of which are not complicated. Those are low-risk births that could be accommodated in the new midwife-led unit.

Concerns were also expressed about the suggestion in the original consultation document that women in Lisburn would travel to the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald. We all know that, if women are asked to travel to Belfast or Craigavon, it will place additional pressure on services in those areas. There is some evidence — the Minister might touch on it — that, in Belfast, for example, some extra units are being refurbished to cope with expected increases in demand at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

I agree with my colleague from Lagan Valley. I have been involved in several campaigns during my 14 years as a member of Lisburn City Council just to ensure that Lagan Valley Hospital had a future in Lisburn, let alone its maternity services. We are all relatively happy that that future has been secured. However, given the situation surrounding the new midwife-led unit, I know that the representatives of the Royal College of Midwives, some of whom are here today, also want a smooth transition so that women who are going to avail themselves of that service in the new unit can go there with confidence if their births are expected to be uncomplicated and women who need consultant-led services in an obstetrics unit can go to the Royal Victoria Hospital or Craigavon Area Hospital without having to give birth in cramped and substandard conditions.

The Minister mentioned the implementation plan and business case in his statement last year.

As elected representatives from Lagan Valley, we need to be assured that there will be a smooth transition, carried out in a planned and strategic way, towards putting a midwifery-led unit to be proud of in Lagan Valley Hospital, and so that women who need to avail themselves of services can go there with confidence.

5.30 pm

Mr Lunn: I am glad that Jeffrey Donaldson brought the debate to the House. It is not often that I agree with every word that he says, but on this occasion, I have no difficulty in doing so whatsoever.

The debate about Lagan Valley Hospital in its totality, never mind the maternity services, has been going on for as long as I have been a member of Lisburn City Council, which is 10 years. I was reminded by Alderman Ivan Davis, our local historian in Lisburn, that the debate has been going on for the 20 years prior to that. He has correspondence dating back to the early 1980s that casts doubt on the future of the hospital, and more recently, the future of specific areas, particularly maternity services. Lisburn has continued to grow over the past 30 years. Although the birth rate may have dipped slightly at times, there is evidence that it is now on an upward curve again.

The question has already been asked, and I also put it to the Minister: where would those women go if there were no maternity service in Lisburn? Anecdotally, at least, there is no space in the Ulster Hospital, the new unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital is operating at capacity, and Craigavon Area Hospital is bursting at the seams.

Last year, I asked the Minister a question about Craigavon Area Hospital. I asked him how many times the hospital had to turn away expectant mothers because of capacity. He assured me that it happened only once and that the mother had been transferred to Daisy Hill Hospital without any complications. I was prompted to ask that question by a senior member of the Craigavon Area Hospital medical staff, who had major concerns about the situation there.

If there is no capacity elsewhere, and if there is no maternity unit in Lagan Valley Hospital, what is the Department's solution? Paul Butler referred to there being 1,200 births a year in Lagan Valley Hospital. I have been told by those who know more about the situation than I do that that number is not sufficient to support a

consultant-led obstetrics unit. However, I have a feeling that it is not far from the number that is required, given that the birth rate is rising.

I believe that the argument about the maintenance of a full unit in Lagan Valley Hospital has already been lost, mainly because of the situation with anaesthetics. Under the overall plan for the hospital, 24-hour anaesthetic cover cannot be provided. That leaves us with the option of a midwife-led unit. That has been suggested for some years and appears to have found favour with the Royal College of Midwives, which gives me confidence. However, the idea has been tossed around for a long time and has been through many reviews and battles. We are now undergoing another review, and I am filled with dread as to what the outcome may be.

At one stage, we were told that the consultant-led obstetrics unit had to close and that there had to be a gap of some 18 months before a midwife-led unit could be established. It was beyond my comprehension as to why there had to be a gap, but we were assured of that by the trust. We subsequently received reassurance that that was not the case and that there did not need to be a gap, but now there are rumours that the review might produce a situation in which there will not be a unit there at all, midwife-led or otherwise.

I ask the Minister for the same reassurances that Jeffrey Donaldson and Paul Butler asked for. I am quite sure that other Members from Lagan Valley will also request those assurances, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

Mr Craig: I reiterate what Alderman Donaldson said about the work at Lagan Valley Hospital. Staff have been under considerable pressure. Members indicated the length of time that there has been uncertainty about services at Lagan Valley Hospital, so it is understandable that that creates a lot of stress for those working there. I want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the staff.

I remind the Minister of what he said when he launched the review of maternity services. He said:

"Safe sustainable maternity services are a top priority".

I have no doubt that that is exactly what the Minister wants to deliver and that he will try to

stick to his word. However, I raised concerns at the time about how capacity at other hospitals would be swallowed up. There was some spare capacity at the Ulster Hospital. The difficulty that I saw was that most people in Lagan Valley, and in Lisburn in particular, will choose not to go to the Ulster Hospital. That is just the nature of geography in Lagan Valley. They will end up going to Belfast, or, at the constituency's other extreme, Craigavon. We have all had representations from those hospitals about capacity.

It is unfortunate to hear bad reports about anyone's experience in hospital. I have a constituent who is a mother of two. One child was born in the Royal, and the other in Lagan Valley Hospital. That mother's experience was of two extremes. In the Royal, she was referred to by a number on many occasions. She never saw the same doctor twice. The level of care was a lot lower than that which she received elsewhere, and she was pushed out the door as quickly as possible.

That is what goes on when services are centralised, because staff are put under tremendous pressure. The Minister is fully aware of the pressures at the Royal, and he has introduced remedial measures to try to correct that, for which I commend him. However, there is still huge pressure, because everything is being centralised in Belfast.

That same mother was overjoyed with the level of service that she received when she chose to have her second child in Lagan Valley Hospital. The staff referred to her by name, which is a very simple thing. She had the same doctor and consultant from day one and throughout her delivery. The doctor was able to refer to her by name and knew her history. That made a massive difference to her experience of giving birth. Those seem like simple things to you and me, but we are men; we do not have to go through the experience of giving birth.

I plead with the Minister to take on board the fact that people want to give birth locally. I also ask him to take on board the other points that Members made. The statistics clearly show that the birth rate is rising rather than declining and that the number of births in Lagan Valley will increase naturally if there is time for that to occur.

I plead with the Minister not to have another review into Lagan Valley Hospital. We have had review after review. We are at the stage when people on the street are saying they believe

that the hospital will close. That is not good for morale in the hospital or for morale right across Lagan Valley. The Minister gave a commitment to the House for a midwifery-led unit.

I have no doubt that the Minister will stand over his word, because he is a man of honour. However, there is huge concern in the profession that a gap may be left as we move to a midwifery-led service while other hospitals are unable to take up the additional capacity. Like other Members, I plead with the Minister for assurances that our concerns are unfounded.

Mr B McCrea: I follow my colleague Mr Craig in commending the Minister for the honourable stance that he has taken, and I hope the Minister takes on board the points that by my colleagues in the Assembly made.

Although Mr Craig stated the obvious — we are all men and we do not have to go through childbirth — we are involved. Part of my thinking on this matter is coloured by the fact that I am the proud father of two daughters. My wife was determined that our first daughter should be born at home. Although we were all prepared, complications arose, and, regrettably, we had to move at speed to a major hospital. We were very please to have around us all the necessary medical expertise, equipment and backup. That is central to Members' argument about the risks that are involved in first pregnancies. My second daughter was born successfully at home, with just the midwife, my wife and I present. It was a tremendous experience; nevertheless, one understands the risks that are involved.

Central is the issue of choice, and here, too, the Minister is to be commended. My party made a commitment in its 2007 manifesto to extend choice. The Minister has not only overturned the decision of the trust, but he has delivered on a manifesto commitment to ensure that there was a choice through the provision of midwifery-led maternity services in the Lagan Valley Hospital.

There is a dilemma, and I understand the case that others made, which is that although there are about 1,000 births annually in the Lagan Valley area, that figure is a little below what is required to make the unit viable, yet the neighbouring units are full to capacity. I am sure that the Minister will address the issue of making sure that appropriate capacity is available for any eventualities.

I thank my colleagues — local politicians one and all — for their endorsement of the Minister's actions on Lagan Valley Hospital. I note that, on 18 March, the Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson welcomed the proposal to establish the unit as a community midwifery-led unit. Moreover, on 25 June last year, Jonathan Craig welcomed the Minister's investment in the hospital, including the midwifery-led unit. I thank those esteemed colleagues for their comments. All local politicians agree that Michael McGimpsey has been a good Health Minister for Lagan Valley. There has been considerable debate; we have fought as a united team in the council to save the services at Lagan Valley Hospital, and I am pleased to say that this appears to have been well received by those who can make the decisions.

Others have made this plea in their own eloquent ways, and I concur with them. It is unfortunate that budgets are tight. I would like to see that there are others in the United Kingdom who have made a commitment to defend and ring-fence the health budget, because the Health Service has the greatest impact on the biggest number of people. I hope that, in coming comprehensive spending review periods, colleagues will consider making a similar commitment for health in Northern Ireland.

In that regard, their support would be particularly well received.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say, but I thank him personally for his efforts on behalf of Lagan Valley Hospital.

5.45 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): The most important factor underlying any decision to do with maternity services is safety — the safety of mothers and that of newborn babies. Other factors are also important, such as giving mothers-to-be the maximum possible choice as to where and how they give birth and making services accessible to all, no matter where they live. To achieve those standards, service planners are left with a difficult balancing act. They must try to provide as many services as possible in local areas close to people's homes. At the same time, they must ensure that our specialist acute services are maintained at a high standard in suitable surroundings for those who need that level of care.

My decision that there should be a midwifery-led unit at Lagan Valley Hospital will mean that women in the Lisburn area will have access to maternity services that would not have been possible under Developing Better Services. In 2002, the DBS strategy for acute services confirmed that Lagan Valley Hospital was to be developed as a local hospital. DBS also established that maternity services would not be provided in local hospitals. Therefore, under DBS, Lagan Valley Hospital would have been stripped of all maternity services.

The reasons for restricting obstetric services to acute hospital sites are based on modern standards, which dictate that a consultant-led obstetric service must be supported by immediate round-the-clock access to paediatrics, anaesthetics, intensive care and all the other services that may be needed when complications arise. It is not possible to provide all those vital services in a local hospital, where there will be an insufficient workload to sustain staff skills to the necessary level.

It is important that Members fully appreciate the current standing of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital. On average, 1,100 babies are delivered there each year. That number of births is too low to sustain the full team necessary to deliver a consultant-led maternity service and to maintain the necessary level of skills for staff. Lagan Valley Hospital has no on-site paediatric cover; dedicated anaesthetic cover is not available for maternity; and there is no on-site laboratory and no dedicated obstetric theatre.

Nevertheless, I recognise that the maternity unit at Lagan Valley Hospital has a strong record and is greatly valued by local people and by those who have used the service. Therefore, I have decided that maternity services will remain at Lagan Valley Hospital. Although a consultant-led service is not possible, a midwife-led service is. Until that change happens, I have ensured that the present maternity service is maintained.

To support many women's wishes, we have introduced midwife-led units beside consultant units at the Ulster Hospital, Craigavon Area Hospital and Altnagelvin Area Hospital, as well as a stand-alone unit at Downpatrick. Those units can provide the full range of services for women classified as being at low risk of complications and not requiring the intervention of an obstetrician, which means that they are

able to give birth in a homely environment supported by a midwife.

Not all the current maternity services provided by Lagan Valley Hospital will change. Mums will still be able to use the hospital throughout their pregnancy. There will also be a consultant presence for antenatal care, ultrasound screening, assessment of complications and post-natal care. Although every effort is made to screen women for likely complications during labour, there will be rare occasions when things do not go as planned. The midwife-led unit at Lagan Valley Hospital will work in partnership with neighbouring, consultant-led maternity units.

Before the midwifery unit is established, all protocols for the transfer of patients will be in place and agreed with the neighbouring obstetric units and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. That will ensure that, when needed, the transfer of women to a neighbouring obstetric unit will happen smoothly and quickly.

I visited the maternity unit at Lagan Valley Hospital on 18 March 2009, when I announced the planned changes, and I was greatly impressed by the staff and their support for the development of a midwife-led unit in the area. Indeed, on the same day, it was not just staff who supported the move: Jeffrey Donaldson, the local MP, and other local elected representatives also supported the move, particularly in light of the delays to the proposed women's hospital. The impact on other units has been an integral part of planning the way forward.

It is anticipated that the Lagan Valley Hospital midwife-led unit will handle 500 births annually. That leaves around 700 births to be shared among the Ulster Hospital, the Royal Maternity Hospital and Craigavon Area Hospital. With those pressures in mind, I recently invested £4.2 million in maternity services at the Royal Hospitals, which will provide an additional capacity of up to 1,200 births, and £3.5 million at Craigavon Area Hospital, which will provide extra capacity for 300 births. A community-led midwifery unit has opened recently in Downe Hospital, with a capacity of just over 300.

The trust will ensure that a midwife-led unit is in place at Lagan Valley Hospital before obstetric services are withdrawn. Ensuring that there is the capacity in the right place to match demand is always an issue, particularly with the dramatic rise in the birth rate. There have been an additional 3,000 births over the past

two years alone. However, there is still spare capacity in the system to deal with demand. The maternity review that I announced on 2 April will take a comprehensive look at the provision of maternity services for women across Northern Ireland. It will look at the services that are available at each stage of pregnancy. It will also take account of workforce issues and consider the role of midwife-led care.

As far as discussions between the trusts are concerned, naturally, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is in discussion with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, because Craigavon Area Hospital and the Royal Maternity Hospital will have a role to play in the changes. I will speak about timescale in a moment. My plan is that there will be no gap between the withdrawal of obstetric services and the continuation of midwife-led provision at Lagan Valley Hospital. The maternity review has started, but it is a regional review. It is not specific to Lagan Valley Hospital. It will consider a much wider range of issues in respect of maternity services in Northern Ireland.

Mr Butler talked about what happened with the Jubilee Maternity Hospital. Who closed the hospital? It was his party that closed the hospital when it had the Health ministry. That was one of the biggest mistakes in the provision of maternity services. The closure of that obstetric-led unit, which was on an acute hospital site and dealt with 3,000 births each year, precipitated many of the challenges that the service has encountered. Indeed, I was one of many people who campaigned year after year to maintain that unit. It gives me no pleasure to say that those of us who campaigned were right. We demanded that the unit should stay open and that, before it closed, the new women's hospital in Belfast should be built. Neither of those steps was taken, and that is where we are.

I plan to have this unit opened as quickly as possible. However, there is a financial implication. Each of the other parties voted to cut the Health Service budget on three occasions — not once, not twice, but three times. One cannot continue to cut the Health Service budget and expect to get the sort of extra provision that is being demanded. That is what the community quite rightly demands. The year before last, demand for health services rose by 12%. It was up 9% last year, but the resource showed a real-terms increase of only

1.1%. The year before that, the real-terms increase was only 0.9%. If one experienced a 20% increase in business and asked staff to provide cover with a real-terms increase of only 2% one would see why we are getting into crisis in the Health Service.

Mr Donaldson: I thank the Minister for his commitment to continuing maternity services at the Lagan Valley Hospital. He talked about funding an additional service. Will he clarify whether the midwifery-led unit will replace the existing consultant-led obstetrics service or be an additional service?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister will have an additional minute in which to speak.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is, of course, a resource issue. These things do not come free, and the obstetricians who are working in Lagan Valley Hospital will work elsewhere. The midwife team in Lagan Valley will require and merit investment support, particularly capital investment. The Member will no doubt recall that, in order to give the Lagan Valley unit the best possible chance, I looked for capital investment in it.

I have demands for £700 million of efficiencies over three years, which the Alliance Party, Sinn Féin and the DUP voted for, and those three parties also voted in an Assembly debate to cut health funding. Indeed, just last week, a further £115 million of cuts was proposed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This cannot go on. I cannot go on asking staff to stretch themselves. The Health Service can only work if it gets support. However, where I am going on Lagan Valley or, as Mr Craig and Mr McCrea said, what I have announced in the past, is that I am determined that, if it possibly can, the investment in the Lagan Valley Hospital will go ahead. At this stage, providing full support for and achieving a seamless transition to a midwife-led unit in the Lagan Valley Hospital is not a big “if”, but it might be if those three parties carry on as they have been doing.

Adjourned at 5.57 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 May 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present. House counted, and, there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Private Members' Business

Over 60s Travel Pass

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

Mr Easton: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Regional Development to take steps alongside his counterparts from Westminster, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, to ensure that free travel passes issued in Northern Ireland for people over 60 can be used in all other parts of the United Kingdom.

The motion calls on the Minister for Regional Development to ensure that citizens here in Northern Ireland are able to use their free travel passes in other parts of the United Kingdom. That is only fair and makes economic sense.

Before getting into the basis of the motion, I want to highlight how we came to the system that we have in place. Free travel for senior citizens was introduced in Northern Ireland in October 2001. Shortly after that, in May 2002, free travel was extended to war-disabled pensioners. The scheme

was extended again in April 2004, allowing half fare for those with disabilities, including those registered as partially sighted; those refused a driving licence on medical grounds; those known to have learning disabilities; or those in receipt of either mobility component of disability living allowance. In 2008, the scheme was extended to all people over the age of 60, as opposed to over the age of 65. Senior citizens in Northern Ireland can travel freely to the Republic of Ireland and vice versa.

When devolution came to Scotland and Wales, owing to the wide variation in the level and availability of concessionary travel across Great Britain, legislation was enacted to devolve the issue in 2000. The Transport Act 2000, which extended to England and Wales, introduced a minimum concession of half-fare, off-peak local bus travel for pensioners and people with disabilities. In Scotland, legislation was introduced with comparable provisions for such groups, although the minimum level of concession was left to the local Minister's discretion. In 2002, the National Assembly for Wales introduced free, off-peak bus travel anywhere in Wales for pensioners and people with disabilities. In 2006, the Scottish Executive introduced free travel throughout Scotland for pensioners and people with disabilities. The Scottish Government, unlike Wales, decided to centralise the administration of the scheme and issue smart cards just like those that we have in Northern Ireland. In 2008, free local bus travel anywhere in England was introduced.

Before 2002, the Northern Ireland scheme was clearly more generous than that anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Since then, a system equivalent to free national travel has come into place, but some differences remain, in that the Northern Ireland scheme offers concessionary

travel on buses and trains, without time restrictions being applied. That is not the same as in Great Britain, where the scheme applies only to bus services.

On 7 December 2009, my party colleague George Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there were any plans to extend the senior citizen SmartPass system to allow for free travel throughout the United Kingdom, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland. The Minister said that he had no plans to extend the scheme. The issue of free, UK-wide travel has been raised not only in this Chamber but in the National Assembly for Wales. In response to a question, the Deputy First Minister of Wales stated that he continued to work with other UK Administrations on the development of a UK-wide scheme. I fail to understand why the Minister for Regional Development has not looked into the possibilities, never mind the benefits, of seeing people from Northern Ireland who are entitled to free travel here have that entitlement extended to cover Great Britain, as has been the situation in the Republic of Ireland for some years. Are British citizens here being discriminated against?

In the 'Policy Review of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme', which was published in January 2007, there was no mention of the cost implications of extending the scheme across the British Isles. Why was that? Why were the cost implications ignored? We should encourage our citizens to travel to other parts of the United Kingdom. The tourism potential of our doing so would bring financial benefits to our economy.

In offering free travel and allowing its citizens to travel without cost on public services across the border and back, the Republic of Ireland is gaining the benefit from tourism. In sending our citizens abroad to spend money, as opposed to keeping them here in the United Kingdom, we are letting the Republic of Ireland gain that benefit. We should encourage our citizens to keep their money in our economy in the United Kingdom first and foremost rather than spend it abroad.

I call on the Minister to see that the scheme be rolled out across the United Kingdom and to make contact with his equivalents in Scotland, England and Wales to see how we go about doing that. I commend the motion to the House and encourage all Members to support it on the basis of equality and common sense.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion is to be welcomed and would be of benefit to people here who have occasion to travel in Britain. However, one of the difficulties with it is that travel schemes in Britain, particularly those in England, are administered through local authorities, and the people to whom the schemes apply can benefit only at certain times of the day when concessionary travel is applied, which is usually at off-peak times. The logistics of administering such a scheme could be put forward as a reason for not implementing it.

In my experience, going back a number of years to when pensions and social security benefits were paid by order book, people from Britain who visited the North were unable to cash their order books in post offices because they were for use in GB only and were designated as such. The order books that were issued here were designated NI, Isle of Man, Channel Islands and GB, so people from here who were visiting England could cash their order books. Therefore, administrative problems could be overcome, but it would take a commitment from all the parties involved to come to any sort of a consensus on the best way to do that.

Concessionary travel could be of great benefit to people from this area who travel to Britain. Many people here do not maximise their benefits. For example, pension credit is very much underclaimed. State pension levels here are derisory, and travel is expensive here and in Britain. A number of older people visit relatives regularly. Unfortunately, however, in many cases, they cannot do so as often as they would like due to the high costs involved.

The all-Ireland free travel scheme that was introduced in 2007 has proved to be highly successful. I know a number of older people who avail themselves of the scheme and find it extremely beneficial. I know a pensioner from the Newry area who used to travel to the Mahon tribunal in Dublin, which he found educational. The scheme certainly broadened his education as well as his travel.

The Minister for Regional Development and the Executive ought to be commended for reducing the age for senior citizens' free travel from 65 years to 60 years in 2008. That has given many older people — people who otherwise would never have had that opportunity because of the costs involved — the opportunity to

travel. Critics point the finger and decry the Assembly for not doing anything constructive. However, free travel for older people is a positive achievement, which I know is much appreciated by those who benefit from it.

Finally, I ask the Minister, who is positive and forward-thinking on those matters, to explore the best way to achieve a positive outcome in regard to the motion.

Mr Kinahan: I will be brief. The motion is an admirable idea. Pensioners or senior citizens deserve everything that the Assembly can give them. It needs to give them much more. The Pensioners' Manifesto makes various points. One issue is the tiny pension, which is not index-linked. We must try to move it in that direction.

I return to transport, which is the subject of the debate. The Assembly must give pensioners as much chance as possible to travel not just around Ireland but the UK as well. We must make that easy for them. Free bus or rail passes — whatever we can provide through that sort of scheme — that can be used throughout the rest of the UK will enable many older people to keep in contact with their families and give them a chance to enjoy life while they are elderly. It will give them freedom and will help them.

Throughout the debate, we must remember that transport needs to be accessible at the basic point of access — the step onto a bus or train. We must remember that, if we provide bus passes, we must also make transport easier to use. At the same time, it must be ensured that bus and rail services are linked by a hub-and-spoke system to all other forms of transport so that older people can move around the whole of the UK and Ireland easily.

If I may be forgiven for a second for a small touch of electioneering, I believe that my party's link with the Conservatives will allow it to have stronger influence on the choices that will be made. I hope that, through that link, we will be able to help the Minister to achieve the motion's aim. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the motion.

Mrs M Bradley: I thank the Member for bringing the motion to the Assembly. In line with my party's policy of supporting older people's rights, I have no difficulty whatsoever in supporting the motion. Furthermore, it has always been my party's wish to see the delivery of a blanket policy that would allow senior citizens the

freedom to travel throughout Great Britain and Ireland using their SmartPasses.

The topic has been broached with the First Minister and deputy First Minister through many tabled questions. I admit that in the current economic climate there are conceivable financial issues with the delivery of an extension of the SmartPass system. However, I believe that there would also be many benefits in pursuing the issue at hand.

We are all aware that we have an ageing population. Older people are living longer, more active lives. Older people know that the more active they are, the more likely they are to have a healthier lifestyle. Although the Assembly has an obligation to look after older people who have illnesses that are physically restrictive at onset, it also has an obligation to make life easier for older people who are still sufficiently able-bodied to live their lives as they wish. If that includes travelling locally, nationally or, indeed, internationally, then the Assembly must do all in its power to make that easier for them. Older people depend on their friends and families for support and companionship. Not all are lucky enough to have those people living close at hand. Many families are spread throughout the world, and, although the Internet has made the world a smaller place, many of us still prefer to see one another face to face.

10.45 am

As of 1 March 2010, a total of 205,318 Senior SmartPasses have been issued in Northern Ireland, which is an indication of the popularity of the scheme. If extended travel options were offered, there would be an even greater uptake. As my party's spokesperson on older people's issues, I welcome any additional beneficial enhancement of the current Senior SmartPass travel system. We must ensure that our older people are assisted in whatever way possible to make their later lives easier, more enjoyable and accessible. I support this important motion, but I also feel that we must commit to hold on to what we currently have. That must not be destroyed.

Mr G Robinson: Page 44 of the 2007 'Policy Review of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme' states:

"The Scheme targets several groups of people liable to or at risk of social exclusion and/or poverty... people with disabilities and...senior citizens."

It is obvious that the intention of the concessionary travel provision here is to target those who are among the most vulnerable in our society.

Those in possession of a Senior SmartPass can avail themselves of free travel in the Republic of Ireland, and the motion calls on the Minister to work with his counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales — perhaps through the use of east-west bodies — to ensure that all those over 60 who wish to visit family in the rest of the UK can use the bus and rail network free of charge there as they can here.

The concessionary travel scheme aims and the terminology used to outline them are revealing. They are for the benefit of those who are the most vulnerable and, therefore, are prioritised by the Minister's Department. Should the aim of the motion be successful, not only would the over 60s in Northern Ireland be able to avail themselves of free travel here and in the rest of the UK, but people from the rest of the UK would be entitled to the same concession here. Properly managed, that could be a great selling point, which could boost our tourist sector in off-peak periods.

I can already hear the Minister talking about the pressures that his budget would be under if the concessionary scheme were extended, and we acknowledge that to be the case. Therefore, perhaps he and his counterparts should examine a centrally funded scheme from Westminster, which would offer unanimity of entitlement and a single card for use across the UK. That would make both the scheme and the distribution of central funds easier to manage.

All Members want to help the most vulnerable in society, and the proposed extension of the scheme is one way in which that can be done. However, I would go further and suggest that the half-fare SmartPass for those with disabilities should also be made available on a UK-wide basis and that that type of SmartPass should also offer free travel. However, today I hope that, like me, all Members will fully support this inspirational motion.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Senior SmartPass system has many advantages, and generally promotes social inclusion. Therefore, today's motion, which aims to improve many aspects of social inclusion, is to be welcomed.

The Senior SmartPass scheme is a great respecter of those who have contributed so much throughout their life and provides respect and help to those who are more isolated. There are many social aspects of the system that must be respected, and those would be enhanced if the scheme were to be expanded.

The system has made an investment in the social capital of our society, and it can continue to do so. However, there are practicalities to address, such as the issue of common approach in GB, which my colleague Mickey Brady has already referred to; financial and administrative issues; and common approach with the rest of Ireland. Those are the details of the system. Overall, I appreciate the general principles of the motion and the approach that it is instigating. Therefore, I support the motion in a general sense. However, great work will have to be achieved on the details, and I look forward to what the Minister has to say about the way ahead. I appreciate the social inclusion aspect, and I hope that there will be improvements.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the motion. I declare an interest in that I have used the SmartPass in our jurisdiction, and it is very welcome. Senior citizens who have a SmartPass use it and enjoy it, which is what it is about. It gives them a good excuse to leave the comfort of their house, hop on a bus and meet their friends for coffee or tea. It gets them out, and it improves their health.

We debated the equality aspects of the SmartPass in the Chamber in 2007. At that time, senior ladies were regarded as pensioners at 60 years of age, although they had to wait a further five years to receive their SmartPass. Thankfully, the Minister, in his wisdom and good sense, was able to address that, and we now have equality. I remember saying that I was able to jump on a bus in Main Street, Kircubbin and go to Killarney for nothing. However, my wife had to jump on the bus, trail after me and pay for her ticket, which was neither right nor fair.

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree that, although the SmartPass has a particular quality, it is totally dependent on the quality of the service available? Does he agree that the erosion of public transport, particularly in rural areas, means that the SmartPass is of no value whatsoever? Finally, does he agree that we need to co-ordinate public services so that people in rural areas can access main-line services such

as train and express bus services? Without that access, the SmartPass is of limited value.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for his contribution. Of course I agree with him.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: I will give way in a minute.

I represent a mainly rural area, so I see that all the time. People living out in the sticks, as they are called, are housebound and cannot simply jump on a bus. I agree entirely with what the Member said. Who knows, perhaps in the not-too-distant future those people will be able to get on a bus and enjoy the service.

Mr Weir: I am sure that the Member agrees that it is good that we now have sexual equality with regard to the cost of the scheme. The Member said that he travelled to Killarney for free but his wife had to trail behind him and pay for the trip. However, the Member had another option: his wife could have stayed at home, and it would have been a holiday for them both.

Mr McCarthy: When we have the opportunity to do so, my wife and I like to travel together. Unfortunately, in my case, that does not always happen. If the motion is passed, as I hope it will be, we will be able to jump on a bus in Main Street, Kircubbin and arrive in Main Street in Kilwinning in Scotland or places in England or Wales. I have no doubt that, in time, that will be the case.

We received information on the subject from Library Services, and I was disturbed to note that, when the Minister was asked questions on the matter in 2008, he said that he had no plans to discuss it with his counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales. I am disappointed by that. I hope that we will agree the motion and that the Minister will then, perhaps, take time to negotiate with his counterparts. I hope that we will have equality when it comes to travel across these islands.

Having a bus pass encourages senior citizens to leave the car at home, which, in turn, helps the environment. There are many benefits to be gained from the motion, and, on behalf of the Alliance Party and the Assembly's United Community, I fully support it.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion and encourage every Member to do likewise. Some time ago, the DUP first announced, through Dr

Paisley, the intention to allow free travel for the over 60s in Northern Ireland. That was met with a roar of approval, not only inside the Chamber but from outside and from my constituency in particular. My office was inundated with people asking when free travel would be introduced and how they could go about availing themselves of it. The number of SmartPass travel passes that all Members sign in our offices is a clear demonstration of the level of interest.

One of the first ladies to apply for a bus pass from my office received help from the staff to fill in the forms. Subsequently, she went on a trip to Banbridge, which, I am sure, is a keenly priced place to visit, and those who live there will be heartened to hear me say so. She returned with chocolates for the girls in the office to thank them for helping her to get the pass that enabled her to travel outside the area and have a good day out. Many people had been unable to do so, but now they can. That example demonstrates some of the advantages of using the bus service.

By the same token, local shop owners in the town told me that Saturday business had increased since the free bus passes came into operation, and elderly men and women with various accents are making purchases. That shows that people from all over the Province are taking advantage of the bus passes and coming to Newtownards to shop. I encourage people, on receiving their free bus pass to come to Newtownards to shop even more than they have in the past.

The introduction of the passes has been an overwhelming success that has benefited all areas of the Province, and now is the time to take the initiative even further. Members of the older generation have not been blessed with opportunities to travel in earlier times, and they should be given that opportunity now. Recently, I read about two pensioners on average income. After paying for food, heating and the bare essentials, one was left with only £2 for the rest of the week, and the other was even worse off, with only 47p. There was no chance that they could pay for a bus anywhere. However, they could claim their free travel, buy a cup of tea and feel refreshed after a break, albeit only for a short time.

The ladies in my church love hearing the announcement of a bus tour, particularly one to the mainland. I know many people who want to

take advantage of such opportunities. For many, that bus tour is their holiday and their chance to spend time away. The extension of free travel to the mainland would greatly enhance the existing provision and increase the number of opportunities.

I am surprised at how skilled the members of our older generation are in computer technology. Their skills far exceed my own, and senior citizens often bring printouts from the Internet to my office. With that knowledge comes the power to do more and the confidence to go further, and older people are accessing every opportunity. It is no longer out of their reach to book a ferry crossing to the mainland and reserve a hotel for the night. The extension of free travel to the mainland will make a sufficient cost difference to enable some people to get away and enjoy breaks during their retirement.

Help the Aged has a section on its website that helps people to find the right break for them, and it has advisers who help people to get away. We can play our part in the Chamber today by supporting the motion and setting the wheels in motion. As we are a part of the UK, our free bus pass should extend to the rest of the UK, which is what the motion calls for. It calls for co-operation from our counterparts in extending to their constituents and ours the opportunity for affordable travel and breaks to which they should be entitled.

I am keen for cross-Assembly co-operation to enable members of the older generation to have a quality of life and experience that they may not be able to afford for themselves. I have been approached by many people asking whether they can use their bus pass to travel on the mainland. Now is the time to put in motion the process that will enable me to tell them that they can. All Members should be able to tell their constituents who are aged over 60 that they can book a ferry or plane and travel about at will to visit family and friends whom they have not seen in years or that they can visit Edinburgh Castle or Buckingham Palace at the same cost as going to Belfast Castle using a free bus pass — nothing. That is the situation that we are trying to achieve today.

I support the senior citizens, and I want them to have the chance to have a life. They should not be bound by financial constraints, because we are in a position to help. Therefore, I support the motion, and I congratulate my colleagues on

the thought that they put into the motion and on bringing it to the Chamber.

11.00 am

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who tabled the motion and those who contributed to the debate. I note that Mr Shannon claimed responsibility on behalf of his former party leader for something that my Department has introduced. I hope that he will be as forthcoming in accepting responsibility on behalf of the DUP for the state of the roads on the Ards Peninsula. However, perhaps Members like to claim responsibility for only the good bits.

I am aware from correspondence that my Department receives from elected representatives and the public that the reciprocity of concessionary travel arrangements across these islands is an important issue for many people. Given the popularity of the all-Ireland free travel scheme for older people, which came online in 2007, it is understandable that people would want to see similar arrangements with the jurisdictions across the water.

The motion has policy and technical components, and the interplay between them is quite complex. Alex Easton and some other Members spoke about the differentials in the operation of the schemes here and across the water, and they alluded to some of the difficulties that are faced in attempting to make such arrangements. I know that Mr Easton provided some background to other schemes, but it might be helpful if I give some background to our current position.

As far as Britain is concerned, the concessionary fares policy is a devolved matter. Each jurisdiction has its own scheme, and, as a general rule, users may avail themselves of concessionary travel only in the country in which they live. Thus, the current position means that pass holders from England cannot travel free of charge in, for example, Scotland, and vice versa. However, there are minor exceptions. I understand that local arrangements are in place in some border areas, and, as a general rule, children get discounts, regardless of their place of residence.

Like the schemes in other jurisdictions, the North's concessionary fare scheme has changed and developed over time. It was established in 1978 under article 5 of the Transport Order 1977, with the intention of extending the existing

concessions available for public transport in Belfast to cover services throughout the North. Eligibility was restricted to residents in the North, and, at that time, free travel was introduced for the registered blind, and half-fare travel was introduced for senior citizens aged 65 and over, people in receipt of a regular disablement pension award and children between the ages of six and 16.

The next major development came in October 2001, when the Assembly introduced free travel for senior citizens. Shortly afterwards, in May 2002, the free travel scheme was extended to award disabled pensioners. At the same time, the electronic SmartPass system replaced the flash pass system. Since then, there have been two major changes. In April 2004, the scheme was extended through the introduction of half-fare concession for four categories of people with disabilities. More recently, in October 2008, we reduced the eligible age for senior free travel from 65 to 60. That brought the North into line with the equivalent schemes across the water where age eligibility is concerned. Interestingly, that is not reciprocated in the South, where the eligible age for senior free travel remains over 65.

As regards reciprocal arrangements, I pointed out that the concessionary fares policies in Britain and here are devolved to the individual jurisdictions. However, a clear willingness exists to consider issues that are concerned with the possible mutual recognition of schemes.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for giving way. Before he leaves that issue, I wish to ask him about the recent rumours that the SmartPass for senior citizens in Northern Ireland is under threat. Will the Minister give the Assembly a commitment today that there will be no interference with, or cutbacks to, that SmartPass?

The Minister for Regional Development:

I assure the Member that cutbacks to the scheme have not been on my agenda and nor will they be at any stage. I am not sure where those rumours have come from. In the run-up to an election, people often put out scare stories in the hope that they become accepted as fact. However, that rumour is certainly not true. I have never considered, nor will I consider, such cutbacks under my watch.

As regards the reciprocal arrangements, a clear willingness exists to consider issues on the possible mutual recognition of schemes.

Members will be aware that the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007, which dealt primarily with arrangements in England and Wales, also made a provision that would facilitate reciprocal arrangements between the various jurisdictions.

Members may also be aware that under the auspices of the British-Irish Council, my Department is exploring the potential for mutual recognition of concessionary fares for people with disabilities and older people across the eight Administrations. However, the work done so far in that forum, and other contact that my officials have had with officials in other jurisdictions, demonstrates that the issues that need to be addressed are more than merely legislative ones.

The most obvious issue is that reciprocal arrangements are likely to impose differing burdens on each jurisdiction. For example, a jurisdiction that attracts tourists will have more expense than one that does not. That issue is particularly relevant in the context of the British-Irish Council. Similarly, different schemes offer differing levels of concession. Our scheme, as Mr Easton said, is, arguably, the most generous, covering bus and rail travel, with no restrictions on the time of travel. In England, by way of contrast, the usual provision covers bus travel but not rail travel and is available only on off-peak services. Therefore, the risk is that those visiting here would have more favourable travel at a higher cost to us than our residents would have when travelling across the water. One way to deal with that problem would be for jurisdictions to pay for their residents wherever they roam. Clearly, the creation of some sort of clearing system would pose technological challenges, as it would have to deal separately with not only Scotland and Wales, but all the English local authorities and, of course, us.

Another way to deal with that would be to agree a standard concessionary arrangement, which would operate in all jurisdictions, for people travelling outside their jurisdiction of residence. However, that would also introduce an additional layer of complexity. Individual jurisdictions would have to operate two separate systems, one for visitors and one for residents. An alternative would be for the different jurisdictions to agree to standardise the concessionary arrangements so that there was a single arrangement for visitors and residents across all jurisdictions. However, it is difficult to envisage an agreement being reached across all jurisdictions. I suspect

it unlikely that a single standardised system would include rail travel, and, as far as the North is concerned, that would mean a reduction in our scheme.

The administration of concessionary schemes must be considered, as, again, there are clear differences between jurisdictions. Scotland and Wales administer and finance concessionary travel centrally through national schemes, as do we. However, in England, schemes are administered by local authorities. It is paramount that my Department can guarantee the financial integrity of the concessionary fare scheme, whatever form it may take. I expect that other jurisdictions want the same high standards.

As Members are aware, access here to the two schemes for people over 60 is carefully administered, and provision of service is linked to the use of a SmartPass. This is necessary to ensure that fraud is kept to a minimum and that the money available for concessionary fares is genuinely used for the purpose for which it is intended. When the all-island scheme was introduced, residents of the South were required to obtain SmartPasses so that the same high standards could be maintained. Those passes were issued by the authorities in the South. I am aware that consideration has been given to the development of a standard pass card in Britain that would be integrated transport smartcard organisation (ITSO) compliant. That could be linked to the development of integrated ticketing arrangements that would also be ITSO compliant. In the North, we are also considering how we might develop a fully integrated ticketing system for public transport. However, in doing so, we would have to take into account developments in the South, which is not committed to ITSO compliance.

Leaving aside the administrative issues, it is difficult to say what a reciprocal arrangement may cost, as we have no statistics for the number of visitors from across the water who are over the age of 60. It is difficult to guess how much use would be made of public transport if it were free. However, we do know that more than 200,000 visitors to the North from across the water are over the age of 55. If we assume that only half those visitors are over 60 and that each person uses £10 of free travel, which is the cost of a return journey between Belfast and Belfast International Airport, the annual cost of concessionary travel would quickly reach at least £1 million. Greater

numbers and an increased amount of travel would push that figure higher.

In common with concessionary fare schemes in other countries, ours was born of an expectation that the very young and the very old should receive discounted public transport costs, and was developed more or less piecemeal from that standpoint. In 2003, the Department felt that a more strategic approach was required and, to that end, the following objective was adopted. The scheme aims to:

"promote social inclusion by improving public transport accessibility through free and concessionary fares for members of the community who are most vulnerable, or liable to social exclusion."

As part of the 2007-08 comprehensive spending review, I made bids for money to support five possible options for the extension of the concessionary fares scheme. Those options were free travel for the over 60s, free travel for disabled people, half-fare travel for young people aged 16 and 17, concessionary travel for long-term unemployed people returning to work, and the introduction of concessionary fares to community transport services. Ultimately, the Executive chose free travel for the over 60s.

I am also happy to state that, with assistance from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, concessionary fare equivalency is now available for elderly and disabled Community Transport members in rural areas.

Given the importance that I attach to our concessionary fare arrangements, I assure Members that my Department will continue to engage with those in other jurisdictions to consider whether there are options to create and extend reciprocal arrangements. However, if additional resources are made available to develop the concessionary fare scheme, the focus should be on those changes that were bid for in the comprehensive spending review. Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Easton: I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. I pay tribute to my colleague from Lagan Valley Jonathan Craig, who is ill and dearly wanted to take part in the debate.

I feel very strongly about the issue, as do my constituents. It is only right to extend the scheme to allow those who are eligible for free travel in Northern Ireland to enjoy its benefits across the United Kingdom. It is odd that citizens of Northern Ireland have been able to

enjoy the benefits of the scheme in the Republic of Ireland for some time but have not had the opportunity to enjoy its benefits in the rest of the United Kingdom. Sharing a land border with the Republic should not mean that our citizens are discriminated against when they travel to the mainland.

I appreciate that there are political arguments involved, but it makes sense to ensure that travel remains free across the British Isles for those who are eligible under the scheme. Why do we have a situation where people can travel across the border for free, and do so in another country, when they cannot enjoy the same benefits in their own country?

Northern Ireland has one of the most generous schemes in the UK, but given the number of people who travel across to Great Britain, I do not see a financial reason for not extending it. Such an extension could generate tourism and keep money within our own economy. At present, because of the saving that they will make on travel costs, the scheme encourages people to take their money across the border into the Irish Republic. We should be doing everything to keep money in our own economy, especially during these financial times. If people with SmartPasses travel to the mainland, they will need somewhere to stay, somewhere to eat, and somewhere to have a coffee or a drink and to enjoy themselves. The positive aspect of extending the scheme is that it will generate local income.

Mickey Brady welcomed the motion but contradicted himself slightly by saying that administrative problems were a reason not to expand the scheme for travel across the UK.

Mr Kinahan said that he wanted pensioners to have the right to free movement across the UK. He also said that he wanted a first-class transport system and he went into election mode. However, he forgot to mention that his Conservative Party friends are going to cut the block grant to Northern Ireland by £200 million and make cuts of £6 billion across the UK. I do not think that they will be supporting free travel for pensioners across the UK.

Mary Bradley supported the motion and said that she wanted a blanket policy on transport across the UK. She said that extending the scheme would be costly, but she also mentioned the benefits.

George Robinson said that he wanted the scheme to target the most vulnerable and that he wanted a central fund from Westminster to pay for it.

Billy Leonard welcomed the motion and said that he respected the current system. He also raised finance and administration issues.

Kieran McCarthy said that free transport helped to improve the lives of pensioners and that he wanted equality across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Jim Shannon mentioned that it was the DUP, through Dr Paisley, that first announced — in the Northern Ireland Assembly — the idea of free travel for the over 60s. He also said that free travel for the elderly was encouraging people to shop in Newtownards and to visit his constituency office.

The Minister, Conor Murphy, acknowledged the issue of free transport across the UK for the over 60s. He went over current policies on the issue and gave a guarantee on the future of the SmartPass in Northern Ireland. He also outlined the difficulties with extending the scheme, including the increase in administration, possible problems due to travel in different jurisdictions and a possible cost of £1 million. The Minister said that he would engage with representatives of other jurisdictions on the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Regional Development to take steps alongside his counterparts from Westminster, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, to ensure that free travel passes issued in Northern Ireland for people over 60 can be used in all other parts of the United Kingdom.

11.15 am

Tidy Northern Ireland Day

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

Mr Kinahan: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to sponsor a Tidy Northern Ireland Day, and to work with councils to encourage local communities across Northern Ireland to get actively involved in tackling litter and improving their local areas.

We all know that we have a fantastic mixture of people in Northern Ireland — community groups, local schools or individuals — who help to clear up rubbish; they are the doers whom we should be praising. However, we all know that there is a large contingent of others who are lazy, idle and let the rest of Northern Ireland down. They are the litterbugs, the litter louts, the ill-disciplined and shameful members of Northern Ireland society.

They are the people who care about no one else. They let us all down, and probably let the rest of society down, perhaps moving on to other behaviour as bad as stoning ambulances and fire engines, and generally not fitting in with society. They are the polluters and parasites of society who believe that it is someone else's job to tidy up after them.

We are pushing for a Tidy Northern Ireland Day, sponsored by the Minister and the Department of the Environment. We thank them for all their hard work in many areas, but we need a Tidy Northern Ireland Day to start a co-ordinated plan, and we need leadership from the Department. Tidy Northern Ireland Day ties in with a tidy Northern Ireland national spring clean; let us adopt that each spring, just as nature does as it refreshes. Let us have a Tidy Northern Ireland Day, when schools, parents, families and community groups muck in to tidy up their patch.

I am sure that all of us, when canvassing and during our daily work, have witnessed the very worst, from the fag end thrown down on the pavement or out of a car, or, as in my case, eight fish and chip suppers flying out of the back

of a van in front of me — polystyrene boxes, brown paper bags and all the chips that had not been eaten. We move on to a mission hall in Newtownabbey that sold its land, the corner of which has become a dump that the new owner has yet to clear. We move to the youths at the weekends and in the evenings hiding behind bushes or in dark corners dropping their bottles, crisp and carrier bags, and leaving them for others to clear.

We move, on a much larger scale, to Lough Neagh and all the rubbish thrown into the rivers and dumped into the lough, which all washes up in a corner of Antrim. We move to the worst of all: the businesses in Mallusk that felt it to be all right to dump toxic waste into the Ballymartin river and the Six Mile Water. Those are just a few of the incidents in my patch, and I know that all Members will have similar, if not worse, in their own patches. It is a total disgrace; it is something that, I hope, we will start towards halting for ever by creating a Tidy NI Day.

Members will note that the motion states:

“work with councils to encourage local communities”.

For the next few moments, I will concentrate not on the communities but on the councils. How many Members, when asked to get litter cleared, cannot find out who owns the piece of land in question? I should have declared an interest at the outset as a councillor for South Antrim. How often do we struggle to find out who owns and is responsible for a wall with graffiti, a hedge or a broken fence?

Councils need a continually updated database with legal backing so that they know who owns or is responsible for everything. Such a database does not exist, and often, certainly in my council, it takes weeks and sometimes months to find out who owns a piece of land.

It is only then that we can identify who is responsible. Councils, the Housing Executive, Departments, schools and others have their responsibilities. They all clean up at different times in different ways and to different standards. By having a Tidy NI Day, we can start off with everything being clean at the beginning of spring, with every patch in a council area being tidied up.

My experience is that councils often do their budgets from the wrong angle. They budget on

how little they need to spend to adequately tidy their patch. In many cases, they fail to reach an adequate standard. Councils should plan to tidy up whole areas to a certain standard at the same time. A Tidy NI Day, as a spring clean, should be budgeted for accordingly. That means that councils must plan for an adequate Tidy NI Day, with skips, bags and tools made available, as well as the organisational co-ordination to pull the whole thing together. It is already there: I am not asking for a great deal of extra cost. The people and the organisation are there — it just needs the will that comes from the top.

We have excellent plans coming in the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. However, that will not work as well as it should until councils know who owns or is responsible for every piece of land.

Once again, I congratulate all those in society who give up their free time, pull together and help to tidy up. We should be cheering those people. The Ulster Unionist Party has consistently pushed for an organised tidy day and many other tidying initiatives. The 'Belfast Telegraph' should also be congratulated on its successful campaign. However, everything is disjointed. There are three big waste management groups; we could go on for much longer if we were to explore how much more they could do. Perhaps they could be linked into how we run a Tidy NI Day. We need an example, and we need the will. We wish to see a Tidy NI Day as described. If it works, it could tick all the boxes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise for being late for the debate. The Committee for the Environment has not specifically considered the merits of earmarking a day in the North to encourage local communities to get actively involved in tackling litter. However, during the Committee's discussions, members have recognised the potential of the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill to contribute to the objectives of the motion. I will say a few words on behalf of the Committee and then as an MLA for Newry and Armagh.

Long before the current Minister indicated his intention to introduce the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, the Committee was being lobbied by councils and councillors, community groups and members of the public about the need for legislation of that kind. On several

occasions, the Committee sought an answer from the Department on the possibility of such legislation being introduced. We were told of the existence of similar legislation elsewhere and how valuable it had been in enabling local authorities to take control and clean up their areas.

When, on 11 February 2010, the Department briefed the Committee on its policy proposals for such a Bill, members welcomed them enthusiastically and noted that their potential to address the cumulative impact of many seemingly smaller issues, such as litter, could make a significant improvement to the quality of life of our citizens. Members welcomed the fact that the draft Bill is designed to provide councils with sufficient flexibility to address their own local problems with a suite of measures specifically tailored for their area.

Litter can take on many forms, from chewing gum that is stuck on pavements and cigarette butts thrown out of car windows to packaging from fast food outlets and unwanted advertising leaflets placed on car windscreens. The Committee understands that the forthcoming Bill will enable local authorities to tackle the whole range of litter problems to improve their areas. In particular, members welcomed the fact that measures proposed in the draft Bill should be cost neutral and that the revenue from fixed-penalty notices will return to local authorities. That, in turn, should provide valuable resources for more innovative approaches to improving local areas. I envisage councils and communities, with powers such as those, taking much more pride in their local areas. That, in itself, should go a long way in encouraging them to get actively involved in tackling litter problems as called for by the motion.

I will now say a few words as MLA for Newry and Armagh. I support the motion and hope that today's debate and the introduction of the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill will raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviour towards keeping our communities tidy. Armagh is not a major retail centre and largely promotes tourism through a local council-backed strategy. I have heard people who visit the island express great disappointment at the state of our towns and neighbourhoods. I am not specifically talking about town centres, because they are catered for; I am talking about areas that are off the beaten track and the back alleyways. It is very difficult, and people have expressed their disappointment.

Many people in my constituency have taken advantage of the recent dry spell of good weather and have been out walking and cycling. That has led to a number of complaints about the eyesore of dropped litter and the indiscriminate dumping of waste, especially along rural roads and in forestry areas. I support councils being given more flexibility to address their needs. Hopefully that will be addressed, not just through awareness of a Tidy NI Day, but by the introduction of the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill.

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

It is important that local communities and residents' groups are given the tools to do the job. Words of support are well and good, but backing that up with real support is essential. I also pay tribute to the continuous initiatives being rolled out in schools to educate young people on how to dispose of litter properly. I think that the motion will complement the introduction of the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Weir: We are often accused of talking rubbish in the House. Today, for once, that is literally true. The motion represents something that the House can unite around, so I will not risk the ire of the Benches opposite by trotting out the old joke about keeping Northern Ireland tidy by dropping your litter in the Republic of Ireland.

I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing it forward. It is a useful motion, but, in a sense, I regret that we have to debate the subject. Mr Kinahan gave examples, as we all can, of people throwing chip packets out and rubbish being dumped around the place. On an Executive, Assembly, local government or voluntary basis, the efforts that are made are worthwhile. However, they should not be necessary. People should show a sense, or a culture, of social responsibility. It is within our abilities, and should be within everyone's abilities, to look after their own rubbish and to dispose of it in an appropriate manner. It is not as if there is a lack of bins or a lack of opportunity to dispose of rubbish. It is the sheer laziness, and sometimes spitefulness, of people that leads to the problem.

I join in congratulating the work of the 'Belfast Telegraph' and the vast legion of people who operate on a voluntary basis and take part in a range of activities, whether community based or council led. The Chairperson of the Committee

said that a lot of schools have bought into the idea of looking after the environment and, in particular, cleaning up litter. Hopefully, lessons will be learned by young people. I would like to see them carry those lessons through for the rest of their lives.

There is no doubting the scourge of litter. One does not have to go any distance to be able to spot that. I grew up and still live close to the coastline of Northern Ireland. I have many happy memories of the beaches of north Down and the Ards Peninsula. When one sees bags of rubbish dumped indiscriminately on various parts of our coastline, it is a matter of deep regret. It is not simply bad for the environment; it is bad for the economy. As an economy, we look towards tourism, and, consequently, we do not want anything to spoil our environment.

The problem is not just on the coastline: a lot of estates and parts of our towns, cities and villages also suffer from the scourge of litter.

Last week, my colleague Alex Easton and I had the opportunity to go on a walkabout with a north Down community group and a number of statutory agencies to see the various actions that need to be taken. As part of that, we went into a field that backs onto an estate. It was both amazing and odd to see the range of rubbish that was carted about to be dumped there, and it showed clearly that there is a problem that needs to be tackled.

11.30 am

The principal role that the Department can play is enabler and facilitator. We are all aware that resources are tight, and I support the idea of sponsorship as outlined in the motion. However, I think it is less about allocating high levels of resources and more about giving a public lead. Principally, this is something that works best through a bottom-up approach. This will be given teeth, as the Chairperson indicated and I am sure the Minister will address, in the clear neighbourhood agenda, which moves beyond simply litter. That is very much at the heart of the problem, and we will come back to it at a later stage.

A lot can be done at local level. I take a slight issue with the proposer of the motion, who spoke about the target of having a litter-free day or a clean-up day. Each year, my council, through its budget, supports a spring clean week in which it co-ordinates local volunteers to help in

the clean-up. It strikes me that resources are not a big issue for councils and that it is more about willingness. Many good initiatives have been undertaken in north Down, Belfast and other areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Weir: It is through such partnership, voluntary action and co-ordination that we can all work together to tackle the problem. I support the motion.

Mr Dallat: The motion provides an excellent opportunity to bring the issue to the Floor of the Assembly, and I congratulate those who have done that. I do not want to be negative in any way, but I suggest that a Tidy Northern Ireland Day alone will not solve the problem. However, the debate at least gives us the opportunity to put forward other ideas. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pounds of ratepayers' money is squandered tidying up what other people have left behind. Those people do not have any respect for the environment or, as the research suggests, they are either lazy or simply do not care.

On a positive note, I must say that many local communities are now taking responsibility for themselves and have organised successful clean-ups. However, it should not be left to communities alone. Indeed, in some instances, the upsurge in litter cancels out their good work. Any organised campaign must involve local communities and needs the co-operation of statutory bodies and other government agencies. The Housing Executive certainly has a role to play. In Coleraine, schools and youth clubs are central to work on environmental issues. Local representatives need to support those organisations by going along to their events and backing them.

Litter has been the Cinderella subject for far too long, and it is time to give it centre stage. Members will have seen in the research papers that there is a wide variation in how councils approach the problem, including fixed penalties and so on. It might be a good idea for the Department to ask for regular returns from the 26 councils to establish where local councils are successful and where they seem to merely pay lip service to the problem. The Department should also give incentives to local councils that can be passed on to the local communities at the forefront of trying to make their environments better.

Excessive packaging is one of the most serious problems, although the Assembly may have no direct control over that. Anyone who bought an Easter egg recently would have been absolutely horrified by the amount of packaging for one commodity, which was used for no reason other than to sell as many as possible. Manufacturers should be made more responsible when they are marketing their products.

Local shops, particularly fast food outlets, have a direct responsibility to look after the environment, especially the area that fronts the shop. From my limited experience of travelling abroad, I know that that is exactly what happens in other countries. I see no reason why it should not happen here.

Every locality is spoilt by beer bottles, cans, blue bags and all the stuff that is the by-product of the off-licence trade. It is difficult to know what we can do about that. If those objects are allowed to remain, a very negative image is cast of the whole community, which is grossly unfair.

I support the motion. In protecting our environment, there is a role for the Minister and for each and every one of us. I used to live in a small town called Malin in north Donegal. Those who have been there know that every year thousands come from all over simply to see why that small village, which is no more than a hamlet, has won tidy town competitions at every level for years on end. For those annoyed that I single out Malin, let me also mention Broughshane outside Ballymena. That is another area that, through local initiatives, has managed to get itself onto the tourist map.

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

Mr Dallat: I have finished, thank you.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion. I agree entirely with John Dallat when he says that one day might be useful. However, in my opinion, it will take at least half a dozen such days to overcome the problem. I do not think that we will ever overcome it completely, but we should make every effort to do so.

I agree with the proposer of the motion. Northern Ireland is probably the dirtiest place around. I do not like saying that, but we should admit it. However hard we try, we seem to be making little progress. I applaud the recent clean-up campaign by the 'Belfast Telegraph'. That was

first class and fine, but it would have to be repeated on a monthly or bimonthly basis to overcome the problem.

Education should be at the core of dealing with the problem. Teachers in primary and other schools do their best to instil in young people the importance of taking their litter home or using the bin. However, not so long ago, I was standing outside a primary school — I will not say which — when the kids were coming out of the building. One particular youngster, as soon as he came through the door, unwrapped a Mars bar and threw away the paper. You feel like — well, you cannot do these things, but there we go. That was a child who was leaving an educational institution.

I will give Members a suggestion that they could think about. I am happy to live on the edge of Strangford Lough, beside a promenade and a car park. In my porch, I keep a thing called a litter picker; I am sure that Members know what that is. On my morning walk to the promenade, I take the litter picker and spend five minutes walking and picking up litter and putting it in a nearby bin. It is handy to do that, and it gives me a bit of fresh air. Members could do the same wherever they live. I encourage each to equip himself with a litter picker and do that little bit for the environment. I am sure that people wonder what I am doing, but I do not care. One morning, while I was doing my exercise, I met a lady whom I had not seen for a long time. She said that she did not think that she would have seen me with a stick — she thought that I had a walking stick.

Ards Borough Council used to provide skips at strategic places, on the instruction of local councillors. That was an excellent scheme; a lot of people made use of the skips. For one reason or another — probably economic — that scheme was discontinued. The council decided that the civic amenity sites or civic recycling sites, as we now call them, that were scattered among the villages would do. However, that is not good enough for the people who live in the countryside or in small hamlets and who do not have a car or access to those facilities. Such a scheme costs money, but, if we want to look after our environment, we should be prepared to spend a wee bit extra. I hope that one day set aside will contribute to a better and tidier Northern Ireland.

Mr Ross: I thank the Members for bringing the motion to the Floor of the House. I noticed that Danny Kinahan congratulated the 'Belfast Telegraph'; he is probably the only Ulster Unionist who has anything good to say about the 'Belfast Telegraph' this morning. Many of his colleagues have been rubbishing everything that it has printed today.

The issue of illegal dumping gets a lot of time in this Chamber. However, the other side of dumping and rubbish is the sort of littering that we see on our streets, and it is good to have a discussion about that. Litter is a major concern. It has a massively negative impact on local communities. It can affect the quality of life and health of many individuals and communities. It can have an impact on attempts to attract investment into local areas. It can also have an impact on tourism, as we have heard from some of the contributions this morning. It is an issue that needs to be tackled. When we go around the country and see on our streets such things as chewing gum, beer bottles, soft drink cans and broken glass, which is a danger in itself, we recognise the need to tackle the problem.

Kieran McCarthy described Northern Ireland as the dirtiest place around. I would not go to quite those lengths in describing our country, but an effort needs to be made to tackle the issue. Danny Kinahan talked about the parasites and scumbags who are responsible for littering. Many people consciously throw away packets because they are too lazy to go to a bin. That is absolutely disgraceful. However, it is worth noting that, when people go to an area that has litter everywhere, it can, perhaps, make it easy for them to litter rather than walk a couple of hundred yards to a bin, because everybody else has done the same. That is the sort of behaviour that we need to tackle.

We can contrast Northern Ireland with other areas of the world. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to go to tourist areas in the United States will have seen gleaming streets. They will have noticed how clean and litter-free everything is. People who live in those areas take great pride in keeping their area tidy. We can learn from that. There is no reason why we cannot have the same pride and sense of ownership of our towns and local communities as some areas abroad do.

We need an attitude change. It is about how we make people think more about their actions.

The Chairperson of the Committee talked about how schools have a responsibility. I agree absolutely. Children are often the conscience of all of us: they will keep us right about littering and recycling. When they are taught about those subjects in school, they are very good at bringing that knowledge home with them.

I was somewhat surprised that Mr Kinahan concentrated on the role of government, particularly the recent Conservative campaign that features what David Cameron likes to call the big society. In that sense, we can buy into the notion that everybody in society is responsible for their actions. However, that individual responsibility has been lost somewhat. Rather than what government can do, it is about what individuals can do by taking responsibility for their actions. However, a mixture of approaches can be taken. We talked earlier about the big spring clean and some of the church groups, school groups and environmental groups that periodically go to beaches or town centres and pick up litter. Like others, I commend those who make that massive contribution.

11.45 am

On the other side, the Government can play a role, and the Minister of the Environment should be congratulated on bringing forward the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, which looks specifically at dealing with litter, such as abandoned trolleys that blight the environment and communities. The Government should also be congratulated on making it easier for local councils to deal with such matters and for allowing them to introduce heftier fines for those who litter. That is the sort of role that the Government should play.

I am not sure whether the motion means that there should be a financial contribution to sponsoring the event, but the present economic climate was mentioned and, if the Conservatives go ahead with their £200 million cuts specifically for Northern Ireland, deciding whether money would be best spent in sponsoring such a day will be very difficult because we will have to look at where money should be focused. Nevertheless, today's debate must be used to highlight Tidy Northern Ireland's work and the importance of ensuring that people assume responsibility for not littering the streets. I am not sure whether the Department will have the resources to sponsor the event, but it would be

a positive step if it were to associate itself with the day. Therefore, I support the motion.

Mr McDevitt: I, too, welcome the motion. I think that this is an important topic to debate here today. When debating motions such as this, it is always useful to look at the available evidence. Consequently, I pay tribute to Assembly Research and Library Services for the information pack that it prepared for the debate.

In the middle of the pack is the 'Northern Ireland Litter Survey 2009'. Most interestingly, when one looks at where litter problems occur in the region, they are most acute in rural areas. In fact, statistically speaking, the dirtiest place in Northern Ireland is the countryside. Mr Weir is not in the Chamber, but I take significant exception to his remarks about dumping rubbish from one part of Ireland in another part of Ireland. In this part of Ireland, we are all guilty of dumping our rubbish outside our towns and cities.

Although rural areas top the indices, they are followed by high-obstruction housing areas, including flats —

Mr Beggs: Perhaps litter costs more in rural areas because there are much larger areas to be tidied.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Beggs for his contribution, which was fair comment. However, it is also indicative of the cultural and behavioural issue that is at the heart of the litter problem, because main and other retail areas and low-obstruction housing, including open-plan estates, are the tidiest parts of the region. Therefore, ironically, high-visibility public areas with reasonably high numbers of people end up being the cleanest.

Some of that, I am sure, is to do with the fact that Belfast City Council, which is home to a considerable proportion of retail and low-obstruction housing areas, tops the league table for fines, not by a modest or significant amount but by an outstanding amount. In fact, between 2004-05 and the last set of figures available to us, which was for 2008-09, Belfast City Council managed to dish out practically as many fixed penalty notices as the rest of the North of Ireland put together.

Undoubtedly, there is a question about policing, which we all support, but there is also a huge

cultural issue around educating people about their attitude to places that they do not consider to be their own, such as the field or the anonymous place that, when one is in a car, does not belong to anyone. That assertion stands up if one looks at litter types. Once again, the survey is very useful because it identifies the type of litter discarded in each area. In rural areas, 64% of pollution is caused by drink bottles. Confectionery is the next highest category, followed by takeaway waste. That contrasts radically with the litter profile in main retail areas, where the problem is with cigarette butts. The survey proves, therefore, that an awful lot of pollution in country areas is as a result of people chucking stuff randomly out of their car windows. Face it: no one will find rubbish that has been thrown into a ditch. It will not be seen. Of course, that ditch could be a waterway, and the material that is thrown away could be a non-biodegradable plastic that may lie there for 1,000 years, but we do not care. Therefore, I welcome the motion because, if it does nothing else, it brings attention to that.

I would like us to think about the regional policy and statutory opportunities that are created by debates such as today's; for example, the opportunity for a ban on plastic bags. Plastic bags are at their most polluting in a hedgerow, rather than in the middle of a town, where they will be picked up by an efficient town or city council cleansing service. They are not only going to lie in a hedgerow for decades or possibly longer, they are going to impact on its ecosystem. Like many of my colleagues, I will continue to ask when we will properly consider the opportunity of introducing a plastic bag ban for this region. On that topic, we should also look at aspects of legislation on packaging, particularly in respect of plastics, over which we have devolved responsibility. By reducing opportunities for pollution with non-biodegradables, we can begin to tackle the overall pollution problem. I support the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak on it.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I had not intended to speak in the debate, but the topic, like many others, is one about which nearly all of us have something to say. I support the motion, which asks for efforts to be made to encourage people to tackle litter, but extensive and hefty fines are the only way to solve the problem. To be honest, people do not really respond to much else.

Enniskillen in my area of Fermanagh won Tidy Towns awards over several years, mainly because of the town itself. The countryside, where I live and farm, is an entirely different story. My and other farmers' calves have died because they consumed plastic bags. Fly-tipping also takes place in the least expected areas. Some fly-tippers have left material containing their names and addresses on my road, and I have visited them to ask whether I might leave it in their front garden. That is one way to catch people.

We should follow the example of the South by making it difficult to have plastic bags about at all. I am not sure that education does a lot of good. I caught people who had heard all the anti-litter messages recently at school, yet they chose either not to buy another bin or to do without one in their new house.

The dumping of gum on footpaths is also a big issue, and it is very costly for councils that try to remove it. Another issue is the quantity of cigarette butts being thrown outside shops that we expect tourists to use. Even those who work in our shops are guilty of that. Spitting should be made as illegal as improper dumping. It seems to be one of those cool habits that young cubs seem to hold on to for ever, but it is very unhygienic at any time. There is a need to encourage people to move away from all those practices, but that must be done by imposing fines. The idea that any other approach will work is nonsense.

Recycling and so on seem to be good enough for domestic waste, but the message has not yet reached business. Businesses such as the big multiples do not seem to have to recycle all of their rubbish; it can be sent to waste disposal plants. How tidy a place is and how it looks — the environment in our countryside and towns — is very important to tourism, and those are issues that can be looked at by all MLAs in their areas.

During the present economic downturn, we must think about the increasing rate at which many shops on our main streets are being shuttered because of the growth of multiples, lack of profit or high rates. If we do not do something about that, we will sleepwalk into a situation of not having a tourist product on those main streets. Tourists generally do not come to see the Tesco stores or the multiples of this world; in many instances, they come to see the picture postcard town centres. Enniskillen is one such

town. Many of our small towns, especially in the coastal area, are also in that vein. Places such as Tralee and Listowel in County Kerry have flower arrangements, and they maintain their areas in a completely different way. They get a return from the product, but we are in a chicken and egg situation. We do not seem to put in the same effort to make places as good as they could be, particularly for visitors. I suppose that it has to do with attitudes and money.

We need to present ourselves properly in every shop in every town, because that is very much part of the environment that people visit. Even how we speak to people will make a difference to how tourists view us.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): I welcome the debate on the request to sponsor a Tidy Northern Ireland Day, which will help to raise awareness of and tackle the problem of litter. The motion states:

"That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to sponsor a Tidy Northern Ireland Day, and to work with councils to encourage local communities across Northern Ireland to get actively involved in tackling litter and improving their local areas."

I fully support all initiatives, campaigns and events that will help to deal with the scourge of litter and create a more pleasant environment for everyone to enjoy. Indeed, I have taken part in activities that were aimed at that, and I am well aware of the excellent work that has been undertaken by many people who have been inspired to act to improve the state of their local area.

I am determined to deal with the litter problem in Northern Ireland. To help draw attention to litter problems, I took part in an event during the big spring clean campaign, which was organised by the 'Belfast Telegraph' and Tidy Northern Ireland. I was shocked by the amount of litter that we gathered during that event, which filled some 30 bags. What should have been a beautiful scenic open area for a local community to enjoy was completely spoiled by excessive litter, including ordinary, everyday household litter such as plastic bags, newspapers, magazines, plastic bottles, crisp bags, beer bottles and nappies. As I said, we gathered all sorts of material into 30 bags. That particular situation was even worse given that the area had been cleaned in the preceding weeks because there had been a concentration of activity.

People keep throwing litter down for others to come along and pick it up for them. In essence, we need to consider cultural changes. People need to rethink their actions and adopt a culture of pride in the area in which they live. The basic starting point is a simple one: we could all help by properly disposing of our litter, either by placing it in bins that have been provided or by taking it home. I know of a park that was recently opened in which no bins were provided because it was believed that greater tidiness could be achieved if people came prepared to take their litter home. Small, individual actions can make a difference to the neighbourhoods in which we live and to open spaces, which should be areas for communities to enjoy.

I understand that the response to the recent week-long big spring clean campaign, which was organised by the 'Belfast Telegraph' and Tidy Northern Ireland, was excellent, as more than 2,000 volunteers of all ages took part. It made a huge impact on the environment of their local areas. Therefore, I pay tribute to the local community groups and voluntary organisations such as Conservation Volunteers that take pride in their local areas and help to tackle the problems caused by the selfish and thoughtless actions of others.

Litter is not just an eyesore but is responsible for a range of other problems and is a considerable drain on resources. The sheer cost of dealing with litter is staggering. Some £100,000 a day is spent by local authorities in Northern Ireland to clean up after other people. That money could be much better used by councils to provide better leisure services and reduce the amount of money that is paid by ratepayers. That £100,000 could be used to build a new high-quality park every day in Northern Ireland. Such facilities would benefit the children of Northern Ireland. People need to get it into their head that properly disposing of litter creates considerable benefits not only financially for themselves but for the environment that they live in and for the marketability of Northern Ireland to tourists.

We cannot afford to have people continue to drop litter and waste.

12.00 noon

None of us wants to live in neighbourhoods that are affected by a poor quality local environment. It drives neighbourhoods down and encourages antisocial behaviour, and that is something that we need to address. Clean neighbourhoods also

attract more investment. They have a positive impact on health, well-being, confidence and civic pride, and they help to promote tourism.

I accept that a Tidy Northern Ireland Day would help to raise awareness of litter problems and the benefits that are to be gained by improving the quality of neighbourhoods and environments. However, my Department is in a somewhat difficult position in the current economic climate. I have to prioritise work areas to make best use of the Department's scarce resources. Last week, we had to announce the redeployment of a considerable number of staff within the Department to ensure that we can meet our budget requirements. We are faced with an economic downturn, and the Department has to find the money to meet the equal pay requirements. We will have to find additional resources relating to other government issues as well, and I suspect that we will face even greater challenges.

If Northern Ireland's Budget is cut by £200 million, and if the Department of Health is taken out of that, my budget will have a deficit of £6 million. If, as some claim, the Department of Education is also removed from the cuts, the Department of the Environment will have to find in its budget another 50% of that deficit, which will be up to £9 million. I assure the House that there is not £9 million available in the Department, and I think that to make such cuts would put us in a crisis situation in which we would not be able to deal with the European directives that we have to deal with. As a consequence of such cuts, Northern Ireland would face infraction proceedings by the European Union. In some instances, we can be penny wise and pound foolish, but I am laying it on the line: if we are being asked to make such cuts as our share of the £200 million cuts that are to be made in the incoming year, those are the consequences that we will face.

With regard to this particular issue, I thought it better that I applied my resources to the development of the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, which was not going ahead and which there were no resources identified for. That draft Bill will considerably strengthen the law available to district councils to deal not only with litter, but with a wide range of other environmental problems. The draft Bill will help councils to deal more effectively with litter in all its forms. Some Members mentioned chewing gum and cigarette butts; the draft Bill deals with

those forms of litter, as it does with fast food and drinks containers and wrapping paper, which become eyesores when deposited illegally. They lead to dirty and unhealthy streets and unsightly local environments.

Someone mentioned rural areas. I know well what it is like to live and own property in a rural area. I often find my fields littered with bottles. In the first instance, one has to ask why so many people drive along the road drinking alcohol and proceed to throw their bottles out of car windows. There is an issue there about litter, but there is also an issue about the consumption of alcohol. It may be the passengers who are drinking, but if they have a considerable amount of alcohol in their systems and they distract the driver, that can have an impact on the safety of other road users.

The draft Bill will also allow for the greater use of on-the-spot fixed penalties to deal with offenders as an alternative to prosecution. Fixed penalties are a more efficient way of dealing with low-level environmental offences such as littering, and if used properly, they provide an effective deterrent and avoid the cost of court action.

I also envisage a future benefit in councils' linking up with other bodies that engage in issuing fixed penalties. If the castigated "redcoats" who are so effective in improving traffic control in towns could be as effective at controlling litter, that option would be worth considering. They might not make themselves any more popular, but they could make the place much cleaner.

The Bill will also allow for the greater use of on-the-spot fixed penalties to deal with offenders as an alternative to prosecution. The fixed penalty is £50, but the proposals in the Bill increase that to £75 and allow my Department to set the minimum and maximum levels. District councils will have the flexibility to set amounts locally, subject to the upper and lower limits, but if a council does not specify an amount, the fixed penalty will be £75.

The Bill is not only about litter. It proposes a wide range of measures and a proper toolkit of powers to help district councils to deal with many of the problems that lead to poor quality local environments. The issues covered by the Bill include fly-posting and graffiti, dog fouling and dog control, noise nuisance, statutory nuisance, gating orders, abandoned and nuisance vehicles and even abandoned shopping trolleys. The new legislation will make a real difference.

It is stronger and tougher than the existing legislation, and it is a significant and important development in the ongoing campaign to improve the environmental quality of our local neighbourhoods, towns, cities and rural areas.

A full consultation exercise on the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill ended recently, and we are analysing the responses. I aim to introduce the Bill to the Assembly before the summer recess.

I reiterate that I fully support any initiative that would help to clean up our cities, towns and countryside. However, as I said earlier, the economic position is such that I do not have the funds available to sponsor the initiative that is outlined in the motion. I have sought to work closely with Tidy Northern Ireland and to encourage the private sector to support that organisation. We all know about the considerable amount of waste, particularly within a radius of a mile and a half or two miles of chip shops and other fast food outlets. I encourage such businesses to become involved. We can proactively go forward with the community, businesses, the Government and bodies such as Conservation Volunteers and Tidy Northern Ireland. Together we can tackle the problem of the blight of litter in our areas, and we can create cleaner and better neighbourhoods for all our people.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council. My colleague Danny Kinahan highlighted that nature undergoes renewal in the spring. It is an opportune time for us as a community to take structured action to try to improve the environment and to right some of the wrongs to which members of the public have contributed. I hope that we can use the occasion to try to educate future generations, as well as adults, because I suspect that most of the offenders are adults, on how they are endangering our environment.

There was some discussion during the debate about whether we should have a Tidy Northern Ireland day or week, and there was an agreement that people would be supportive of the motion. The idea of introducing a day is merely to give an increased focus to the issue. It would mean that the 'Belfast Telegraph', which has run an excellent campaign this spring, would not be alone in reflecting people's concerns about their local community and how litter has been destroying it. We would draw in the wider media,

so that the message could be transmitted to an even wider audience.

The issue will not be overcome in a day. The problem is ongoing, and it will last for a number of years. However, in the spring, there is a particular need to take action before the grass cutters shred the plastic and smash the bottles that have been abandoned in our green spaces. Therefore, it is a useful time to take action and to highlight the issue in the media.

My colleague Danny Kinahan contrasted doers — local groups and schools that involve themselves actively in trying to right the wrong — and people who throw material out of their car, with no regard for their neighbours and local community. We all have an obligation to shift the balance so that more people become doers and take responsibility.

Gerry McHugh mentioned fines. If we are to shift the balance and have a more responsible community, fines will play a part in achieving that. However, education will play the biggest part. How we educate more and more people about the importance of protecting the environment and taking litter home to dispose it of responsibly will be imperative. Furthermore, community pressure will build, and peer pressure will be applied. The community will report people who are irresponsible and destroying our community.

Cathal Boylan, the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, rightly pointed out that the Committee, on which I serve, has been lobbied for some time on the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. I am content that the draft Bill has been published, and I thank the Minister and his Department for doing that. The legislation has been delayed for too long in Northern Ireland. Powers have existed elsewhere for a number of years that have allowed local authorities to address concerns through the issuing of fixed penalty notices, and so on, which deal efficiently with people who offend. I appreciate the fact that the Department and the Minister have published the draft Bill. I hope that it will become law before too long.

I have worked alongside a number of groups in my constituency on litter clean-ups. They are a useful tool by which every community can improve its neighbourhood. Not only do they enhance the environment but they bring out the best in people. Litter clean-ups involve young

people and educate them. As a result, when they become adults, they will be doers rather than the louts to whom Members referred who desecrate the countryside and have no regard for their fellow citizens.

I speak in particular about the Monkstown area, where I once assisted Monkstown Community School's youth group in a tidy-up. Those young people took a clear lead and showed that they were taking responsibility for their area. They invited local adults and residents to assist, but guess what? The young people did the work. It is important that young people be praised when they are proactive in trying to better their community.

As other Members said, there are a number of benefits to be derived from tidying up areas and dealing with litter. The environment benefits, a better sense of community is created, and Northern Ireland's appearance is improved. Cleaning up neighbourhoods will assist the tourism industry, which is becoming increasingly important to us. It will also assist the agriculture industry, which tries to market the idea that good food is in Northern Ireland's nature. It is important that we present a clean and tidy environment to reinforce that message and to assist the agriculture community in its exports, which are an important feature of local production.

Peer pressure needs to be applied to people who drop litter. Occasionally, that means that one must speak to someone who has dropped litter. Although it is not nice to have to do that, it has to be done. It may mean taking down someone's number plate. It may mean reporting and fining people. As Conall McDevitt said, Belfast City Council seems to be taking a lead. Our other councils may be able to learn a lesson from Belfast City Council and try to identify good practice so that more people can be held to account. Therefore, on one side, there will be a carrot, which will be a positive, educational message. On the other side, there will be a stick to enforce the message by issuing penalties to those who abuse the local environment.

The cost of cleaning our streets is some £28 million a year. In my constituency, more than £600,000 is spent in Carrickfergus, more than £300,000 in Larne, and more than £900,000 in Newtownabbey. That adds up to a huge amount of ratepayers' money that should not have to be spent. If everyone were to dispose of litter

properly, it would not be on the streets, and the streets would not need to be cleaned as frequently. Money could be saved. I am certain that ratepayers would appreciate having that money in their pockets. Alternatively, it could be better spent on other worthwhile projects.

12.15 pm

The motion calls on the Department to take the lead on the issue. I appreciate that these are difficult financial times for the Department, and, in tabling the motion, neither I nor my colleague is calling for the Department to make a huge amount of money available. Instead, we want it to provide leadership, which I am sure is already being given and into which local councils can have more buy-in. Councils know the local community context, they look after the waste and street cleaning in their areas, and they, too, can have an enhanced role. However, ultimately, the issue will be addressed only through the involvement of local communities and if those communities take responsibility for their areas. The route that should be followed is one where the Department takes a lead and where local councils also take a local lead and involve the local community.

I also welcome the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, which the Minister mentioned. It will provide a more efficient system of fixed penalty notices that will make it easier and less expensive for those who are abusing the environment to be brought to account.

Much mention has been made of the anti-litter campaign that the 'Belfast Telegraph' is running. We ought to give due credit to the 'Belfast Telegraph' for that. Many Members, such as Danny Kinahan, Peter Weir, Kieran McCarthy and, indeed, the Minister, rightly praised that campaign. The 'Belfast Telegraph' has shown good leadership in tackling the matter.

In my constituency of East Antrim, some of the beauty spots have been desecrated, and people have dumped sofas, chairs and general rubbish close to the reservoirs that feed water to our homes. We must come down with a very heavy stick on those who are littering in that way, and we must have the community's support and the information to allow us to do that.

John Dallat and other Members rightly mentioned the difficulties with the packaging that is used for items such as Easter eggs and fast food.

Local pride was also highlighted, and, as Alastair Ross indicated, when people visit Europe or the United States, they can see that that is important. It gives people a positive experience, and we must get to that point. Alastair almost supported the concept of a bigger society, and I take that as a compliment to the direction that my party is going. However, I do not want to politicise this issue.

I thank the Minister for his support, and I urge him to take a further lead on the issue to enable greater community involvement. That will allow us to improve our community, our environment and the tourism and agriculture industries that we all rely on so much.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of the Environment to sponsor a Tidy Northern Ireland Day, and to work with councils to encourage local communities across Northern Ireland to get actively involved in tackling litter and improving their local areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is Question Time. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.18 pm.

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform Members that questions 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme

2. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding the Arts Council will allocate to the musical instruments for bands scheme in the current financial year.
(AQO 1135/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure

(Mr McCausland): The Arts Council has set an initial budget of £80,000 for the musical instruments for bands scheme in the 2010-11 financial year. However, I have been able to make an additional £120,000 available for the scheme. That will increase the funding available to £200,000, which was the sum allocated last year. The scheme reopened for applications on 30 April and will close on 3 June. The Arts Council has indicated that funding decisions will be made by the end of July.

Mr G Robinson: What is the Minister's assessment of the importance of the marching bands sector in the cultural life of Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The marching bands sector is the largest community arts sector in Northern Ireland, with an estimated 20,000 participants. It has much to offer in terms of musical excellence, musical education and cultural tourism. It has the ability to develop into a viable creative industry with benefits for wider society. I have been having discussions with marching band representatives to consider a more strategic approach to assist the future development of the sector, and I am hopeful that that will be productive.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister know whether the funding stretches to band uniforms, and does he accept that marching bands have a

tradition right across the many communities in the North?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The funding available through the Arts Council is specifically for musical instruments and, therefore, does not include uniforms. Funding is also available for tuition through the Ulster-Scots Agency. The focus is on instruments, tuition and improving musical ability. The Member is right to say that bands in Northern Ireland have a wide variety of backgrounds. When we have completed our work, 20,000 participants may be an underestimate. However, there is a wide range and a wide diversity from across the community.

Physical Activity

3. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether his Department has any plans to encourage its staff to participate in sport and physical activity, including the adoption of the Bike 2 Work scheme.

(AQO 1136/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I welcome the Member's interest in efforts to encourage participation in sport and physical activity and the reference to the Bike 2 Work scheme. As Minister with responsibility for sport and recreation in Northern Ireland, I make efforts to encourage participation in sport and physical activity. That is a matter of deep concern, which is why, in my foreword to 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation', I identified the need to halt the evident decline in adult participation as a key early priority for Sport Matters. With that in mind, my Department has developed an action plan, framed around Health and Safety Executive management standards, aimed at improving health and well-being in the workplace. DCAL staff are also encouraged to avail themselves of Health Works, an initiative run by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association that promotes health and well-being in the workplace.

The Bike 2 Work scheme was piloted by the Department for Regional Development (DRD). I understand that DRD is currently evaluating the pilot, with the aim of publishing the results in time for Bike 2 Work week in June. My Department will await the outcome of the DRD evaluation before considering adoption of the scheme.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I am encouraged to hear that, on the outcome of the evaluation, he is minded — he may not have used those exact words — to look at the Bike 2 Work scheme. That is very welcome. Perhaps he can take another lead from the Minister for Regional Development and initiate Irish classes in his Department.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

On the first point, I do not know whether the Member is a mind reader, but I said very clearly that, when the evaluation is completed, we will certainly consider the scheme carefully and sympathetically.

On the Member's second point, she will be well aware that we are developing a strategy for minority languages to cover both the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots language. The strategy will be forthcoming in due course.

Lord Browne: The Minister referred to the Sport Matters strategy. What is the latest position regarding the launch and implementation of that vital strategy?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I intend to launch the strategy formally at the Sport Matters monitoring group's first meeting, which is scheduled to take place on 13 May.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the Minister is aware that I own a bike purchased under the Bike 2 Work scheme, and I use it to commute to and from here regularly. Will the Minister join me on the Bike 2 Work scheme in June and possibly encourage other Belfast MLAs to use their bikes rather than their cars to travel here?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I can assure the Member of my commitment to physical exercise. I spent eight hours yesterday out walking and found it very refreshing and helpful. Over the summer months, I will be doing a great deal of walking, although perhaps not in the manner that the Member would encourage. Nevertheless, walking is my preferred means of exercise.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Community Facilities

5. **Mr Bell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of how better use could be made of public-owned facilities

within the community such as schools' sporting facilities. (AQO 1138/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Responsibility for determining how better use can be made of public-owned facilities in the community, such as schools' sporting facilities, rests in the first instance with the owners and operators of such venues. In my view, however, better use of sports facilities is best achieved through local partnerships and arrangements among schools, sports organisations, local community organisations and councils, which have responsibility for recreational development in their own areas.

Northern Ireland already has some good examples of such partnerships and arrangements, such as the dual-use sports facility scheme at St Patrick's High School in Keady and the Waterworks multi-sport facility in north Belfast, which specifically sets out to serve local schools and the local community. 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019', although it acknowledges local examples of good practice, nevertheless identifies a substantial need for both improving community use of existing sports facilities, including those in schools, and addressing design and condition deficiencies in many areas. That is one of the issues that I will be considering as part of the implementation of Sport Matters.

In the case of community use of school sports facilities, I have requested a meeting with the Minister of Education, Caitríona Ruane, to discuss ways in which we might jointly improve collaboration in the delivery of sports facilities for schools and the community. A date for such a meeting was recently set but postponed at the request of the Department of Education. I am hopeful that the meeting will be rearranged in the near future.

Mr Bell: That being the case, when will that meeting occur? Surely urgency is of the essence. Secondly, what does the Minister hope to achieve by holding such a meeting?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I recently received a letter from the Minister of Education, in which she agreed to my request for a meeting. In her reply, she advised that she would be in contact shortly to agree a date for that meeting. As I indicated in my previous answer, the meeting was postponed at the Department of Education's request, but

I hope that it can be rearranged in the near future. Primarily, I want to ensure that we start genuinely delivering on the commitments made in Sport Matters on co-ordination and sharing of resources. I want to encourage a greater partnership approach to the development of sports and PE facilities among my Department, sports organisations and the education sector. Ultimately, I also want agreement on how we can encourage more shared use of sports and PE facilities across Northern Ireland in order to encourage greater participation by the community at large as well as young people and schoolchildren.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am heartened by the Minister's answer. I am sure that he is well aware that some communities are crying out for access to those facilities, some of which are state-of-the-art. Will the Minister outline whether any funding opportunities are available? I am aware that the cost of insurance is sometimes put up, thereby preventing communities from accessing such facilities. If funding is available, we could get together and collectively sort out those issues.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As I indicated, we will set up an implementation or monitoring group, however one wants to describe it, to take forward the implementation of the Sport Matters strategy. I am sure that all sorts of issues will emerge in the course of that group's work. We want to ensure that facilities, where those exist, are available generally. If there is an issue about insurance, I am sure that that will be looked at. One of the key points is that there is no point in having partnerships and working groups unless there is a proper cross-departmental approach. That means that everybody must bring something significant to the table in respect of resources.

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome the Minister's thinking on the issue. Making use of schools in that way is a good idea. However, I share Sue's concerns. People who come in to use school facilities must share responsibility for any damage that occurs on the premises, because schools do not have a lot of money and cannot afford to pay big money in order to repair such damage. Using schools in that way is a great idea, but a rule must be put in place to ensure that people who use school facilities are equal partners who share responsibility for everything.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In a sense, we are discussing the issue as though it might happen, but it is already happening. Some schools are open to the public, and communities are using their facilities. That is obviously working satisfactorily, because I have not heard any complaints in that regard from either users or schools. A number of schools are on track for completion and will be open for community use in the near future. We must get the right arrangements in place and look at examples of good practice. If the arrangement between a particular school and the wider community is working well, we must learn why that is successful and then replicate it in other areas. Everybody agrees that that is important. Let us move ahead and implement that as soon as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 6, 7 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Arts Funding

9. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what additional financial support his Department will provide for the arts sector.

(AQO 1142/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I am pleased to note that the Arts Council's revenue budget for 2010-11 has increased from its 2009-2010 opening position of £15.2 million to £15.5 million. I was disappointed that the Arts Council's anticipated budget decreased after the Executive's review of 2010-11 spending plans. However, the Arts Council's opening capital allocation for 2010-11 has also increased significantly to £16.5 million, compared with the previously indicated budget figure of £9.6 million. Although I am aware that arts organisations will be disappointed that the previously indicated revenue allocation was revised, I stress that the focus going forward must be on prioritisation, efficiency and effectiveness to ensure the best possible use of the funding available.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. I am sure that every Member agrees that it is important that we support our creative industries. However, I do not think that we support them enough. Will the Minister outline the difference between funding for community arts and professional arts?

2.45 pm

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I

pick up on a point that the Member made in her question: the creative industries are one of the most important areas for my Department, and we have been looking at how Governments in other countries and regions address the need to develop the creative industries. For Northern Ireland, that is an area of real growth potential for the future. However, society in general and even the political world have not yet come to understand the potential that is there.

The Arts Council sets aside particular funding programmes that are open to community and professional arts organisations. Sometimes there are grey areas, because a community arts organisation may employ a professional artist on a particular project. Therefore, it is very difficult to demarcate how much funding goes to one or other sector or which programmes are set up for one or other sector. There is also a grey area as to where the voluntary sector stops and the community sector starts. However, those issues are somewhat secondary. All sectors — professional, voluntary and community — are important, and all are part of the arts infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How has the Department responded thus far to the recommendations of the inquiry that was carried out by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The inquiry into the arts sector in Northern Ireland is valuable and contains a tremendous amount of information. One of the real values of the Committee is that it brings forward a substantial amount of information on a range of issues, as with its report on a museums policy, which the Department is responding to. There are some things that the Department and the Committee will agree on and others that we may disagree on. However, I value all the work that is done by the Committee, because it helps to inform all that we do. There were recommendations that the Committee did not make which, I thought, it might have, but we will take on board the recommendations that were made. That is an ongoing process.

Mr Kinahan: How does the Minister plan to use the extra funding to promote excellence in the arts?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Whether it is in the arts or in sport, the two important things are participation and performance, which means access and excellence. It is not a case of one or the other; we recognise the importance of both. A broad base of participation is necessary to bring people through and enable them to achieve their potential and achieve excellence. Therefore, we support participation and performance through funding from the Arts Council for high-achieving professionals and through the implementation of its programmes. The Member is right to emphasise excellence, although others may place the emphasis on access. We see the two as fitting together.

Irish Language Strategy

10. **Mr Leonard** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the current status of his Department's proposals for a strategy to enhance and promote the Irish language.
(AQO 1143/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since coming into office at the beginning of July 2009, I have given special attention to the development of a regional or minority languages strategy. I am currently engaged in correspondence with the Minister of Education on the issue, and it is my intention to bring a draft strategy to the Executive in the near future, which can then go out to consultation.

Mr Leonard: Does the Minister accept that deadlines have been missed and that a vacuum has been created? There is a lot of mistrust and a sense that the issue has been put on the long finger. We may as well be asking how long a piece of string is. A strategy is needed to fill that vacuum. Does the Minister accept that giving a definite date today would be of some comfort to the Irish-language community?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There are two important elements in the strategy for both the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots language and culture: broadcasting and education. For any minority language or minority culture across the world — I have met people from minority language groups right across Europe — those are two key areas. We have commitments on an Irish-language broadcasting fund and an Ulster-Scots broadcasting fund. Therefore, the issue of broadcasting has been addressed to some extent. Broadcasting is, of course, a reserved matter.

The outstanding matter is education, which is why I said that we were in correspondence with the Minister of Education. Once that area is resolved, we will be able to bring the strategy forward. However, until that happens, there will be a difficulty. I would like to see progress on the education aspect of the strategy, which would enable me to bring it forward.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister indicate the likely cost of developing and implementing an Irish-language strategy? Would that cost be in addition to the £20 million that was approved for the Irish language at Hillsborough?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The position is very clear. My predecessor and I made it clear that, in bringing forward the strategy, it was our understanding that there will be no additional funding available to implement a minority languages strategy.

The funding for the Irish language to which the Member referred was a commitment from the Government in Westminster. That funding is separate from the Assembly, and we have no control over it. There used to be funding for an Irish-language broadcast fund that came directly from Westminster over a number of years, but the difference now is that we will also have funding for an Ulster-Scots broadcast fund. That is a new development, and it is something that people in that sector have called for over many years and we have finally achieved. We will also have a parallel situation within Northern Ireland Screen. Just as there will be a section that deals with the Irish language, there will be a section that deals with Ulster-Scots broadcasting.

As, I am sure, the Member will agree, it is important that we move towards cultural equality in Northern Ireland. We are moving in that direction, and I am sure that the Member will want to commend us for our efforts in that regard.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar an chéad dul síos ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur air i dtaobh, uimhir a haon, an fráma ó thaobh cúrsaí ama de; agus, uimhir a dó, na céimeanna a bheas an tAire ag glacadh i dtaobh gabháil i ngleic leis an comhairlí áitiúla agus leis na heagraíochtaí teanga. Chomh maith leis sin, ba mhaith liom ceist a chur air faoin mhuintir eile atá ag obair leis an teanga a chur chun tosaigh.

Will the Minister give us a time frame for the process so that we can know when it will be concluded and when a strategy will be in place? Will there be proper consultation with Irish-language organisations, the community and voluntary sector and the district councils, which have a valuable input into the promotion of the Irish language?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Member for his questions. In answer to his first question, I refer him to one of my previous answers. We await a satisfactory response from the Minister of Education. That is one of the things that is holding us up. As soon as we get that, we will be able to address the process of putting the strategy to the Executive before putting it out to consultation.

We see consultation as a vital aspect of the strategy development process, and I will ensure that there is a full public consultation as part of that process. I am keen that the strategy is developed in a mature and reflective way, in which every voice is heard. However, I will be more impressed by the quality and detail of responses than by the generic quantity. It is quality that matters, not quantity.

The interdepartmental charter implementation group (ICIG), which has membership from all 11 Departments, the Court Service, the NIO and HM Revenue and Customs, has been consulted on and contributed to the formation of a framework draft strategy. The ICIG will remain a consultative forum throughout the strategy development process. However, we expect that consultation will be widespread and that that is an important element of the process.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Arts Funding

12. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the balance struck by the Arts Council in funding community arts and professional arts as set out in its annual support for organisations programme 2010-11. (AQO 1145/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is clear that in the current challenging financial environment the Arts Council has had difficult decisions to make about the annual support for organisations programme (ASOP). In the circumstances, however, I believe that the

council has struck a fair balance across the various arts sectors.

The Arts Council has allocated more than £2 million or 20% of the 2010-11 ASOP budget of £9.9 million to a range of community arts organisations. That is a £200,000 rise or an increase of roughly 10% on the 2009-2010 allocation to the community arts sector. The Arts Council also has other funding streams available to support community arts projects and activities. In quoting those figures, I note the point I made earlier that there is a difficulty in being very precise, because it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between voluntary arts and community arts.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, given the popularity of community arts, particularly festivals, will he be more specific and tell us why so many community-based organisations have, in fact, suffered a reduction in funding?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I indicated that there was a small increase in the revenue budget for the Arts Council. The Arts Council has a wide range of areas to cover. A Member earlier raised a point about excellence, and sometimes that falls clearly in the area of the professional arts. We also want to have the access to which the Member opposite is referring.

Festival funding is, of course, devolved to local authorities, so they are the folk with responsibility for that. There is money from central government, but there is also equal input from local government. Therefore, we need to encourage all the players, all who can contribute and all the stakeholders, whether central government, local government or, indeed, the private sector, to increase as far as possible their support for the arts.

It is a financially difficult time. We therefore need to do all that we can to get every contributor. As I indicated, there is work to be done in some areas on festival and other funding, particularly arts funding, by some local authorities, who could, maybe, do a little bit more. We also need to work continually with the arts and business to draw in more funding from the private sector. Clearly, difficult decisions have to be made about the allocation of central government funding, and, if the Member would like to suggest that maybe the Department of Education or some other Department should hand over additional money for the arts, I would be more than happy to take it.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am sure that the Minister will join me in offering condolences to the family of the young man who died in tragic circumstances at the Kirkistown racecourse in my constituency on Saturday. We offer the family sympathy.

The Youth Action arts unit does enormous good work for some 450 young people. One of the catastrophes of the budget cutting or trimming back is that there is nothing for that group. It has been refused funding from the ASOP —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister give those 450 people any encouragement that they will be catered for in some way despite that massive cut?

3.00 pm

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I join the Member in expressing sympathy to the family of the rider who was killed so tragically on Saturday.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on why a particular organisation did or did not get funding for a project. However, if a group does not get funding through ASOP, it should look at the lottery funding that is available. Indeed, there are a number of different possible programmes.

At the end of the day, there is competition for funding; it is the same right across the United Kingdom. Not so long ago, I spoke to folk from the Arts Council in Scotland, who told me that the same issues apply there. Groups get funding for one year, but perhaps do not get it the following year because the process is competitive. We need to do all that we can to support the arts organisations and as many projects as we can, but I encourage the people who are involved to look at alternative sources of funding and at other Arts Council programmes.

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1 and 2 have been withdrawn. The Member is not in his place for Question 3. I call Mr Alastair Ross.

Schools: Newbuild Projects

4. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the capital review for newbuild schools. (AQO 1150/10)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Is tábhachtach go bhfuil an t-infheistiú in eastát an oideachais i gcomhréir leis an gcreat iomlán beartais agus go dtacaíonn sé leis an gcreat iomlán beartais, lena n-áirítear na dualgais reachtúla um chomhionannas agus um spriocdhíriú ar bhonn riachtanas cuspóireach. Lárnach dó seo atá Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith, an curaclam athbhreithnithe, scoileanna inmharthana, an t-athbhreithniú ar an nGaelscolaíocht agus an creat teidlíochta.

It is critical that investment in the education estate is consistent with, and supportive of, the policy framework and that it adheres to the Department's statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of that is Every School a Good School, the revised curriculum, sustainable schools, the Irish-medium review and the entitlement framework. I have commissioned a review of all capital projects to inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and to the management of the schools estate. That will ensure that we put the right size and type of school in the right location so that the needs of children and young people can be met.

Since May 2007, 39 major capital school projects have been completed, representing an investment of over £253 million in our schools estate. A further 16 major capital school projects are on site, representing a further investment of over £252 million. In addition, 69 major capital school projects are at various stages in the planning process.

I want to build new schools, but, as the Member is aware, the Executive set the education budget. In my budget statement of 21 April 2010, I highlighted the challenging financial position that is faced. My Department has tough decisions to make, and I look forward to support from all parties when I make bids for additional funding during in-year monitoring rounds. I emphasise that I have not withdrawn funding for any school. However, currently, inevitably, and in future, finance will be limited and difficult decisions will have to be made. Given the challenges that we face, I am not in a position to give specific dates for the completion of the review or for future progress of any particular scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to switch off their mobile phones.

Mr Ross: While canvassing over the past number of weeks, particularly in Newtownabbey, I have noticed that Whitehouse Primary School is one issue that has come up more than any other. Why did the Minister visit the site after the school was burned down and give assurances to a number of individuals at that school that it would be rebuilt, yet no progress has been made? When will she decide to rebuild that school so that the children who have no school can go back to having facilities of their own?

The Minister of Education: Is maith is eol dom na dúshláin atá roimh Whitehouse Primary School maidir lena riachtanais cóiríochta.

I am aware of the particular challenges that face Whitehouse Primary School through its accommodation needs. I visited that school and, indeed, others that suffered attacks. Departmental officials have worked closely with the school and the North Eastern Education and Library Board to progress the scheme. All capital schemes need to be examined relative to one another and in the context of a capital budget that is lower than that of 2009-2010.

Whitehouse Primary School is included in the review of all proposed major capital works projects, and, as I stated, officials are working to complete that process. It is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project before a decision is made. Although I recognise the challenging circumstances of that and many other cases, I am not in a position to give specific dates for the completion of the review or for the future progress of any particular schemes.

I recognise the expectations of parents and pupils at Whitehouse Primary School, and I acknowledge their disappointment that those expectations have not come to fruition in the short term. I look forward to Members' support, and that of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, when I bring proposals for future resources to the in-year monitoring process.

Mr Beggs: The Minister says much about equality, but she does not demonstrate it by her actions. Does she accept that Whitehouse Primary School serves an area of need? The children cannot even have their dinner at lunchtime; they must use the canteen at 11.30 am. When will her actions demonstrate equality?

The Minister of Education: All schools in our sector will be supported on the basis of equality. In the review that I am carrying out, equality and targeting on the basis of need are two of the priority criteria.

Mr A Maginness: I visited the school on Friday morning and saw at first hand the extremely stressful conditions under which the teachers and pupils have to operate. I also heard that the Minister gave an undertaking to the staff and parents that the school would be a top priority.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Members should ask a question.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister is reneging on her commitment to the school.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must come to his question.

Mr A Maginness: The community badly needs that school to be the top priority.

The Minister of Education: I do not know what the question is. The Member should not be playing politics with the situation. I visited the school, and I said that it, along with other schools, remains a priority. I also said that I am carrying out a review of all capital projects in light of the cut to my capital budget. I look forward to the support of all parties when I bring forward proposals to the Executive. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that it is good order to make all remarks through the Chair.

Mr Neeson: I share the concerns that have been expressed by other Members. I have received hundreds of e-mails and letters about the situation. Will the Minister explain why there are delays in reaching decisions on newbuilds in other areas of East Antrim, such as Corran Integrated Primary School in Larne and Woodburn Primary School?

The Minister of Education: I explained that I have less money for capital builds because of the Executive's Budget. I must ensure that the review of capital projects is based on equality, fairness and targeting on the basis of need. That is what I am doing, and that is what Members would expect me to do. I am examining all the capital projects and matching them against the relevant criteria. I will come to the House on completion of that process.

Artigarvan Primary School

5. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Education what progress is being made on the replacement of Artigarvan Primary School, Strabane.

(AQO 1151/10)

The Minister of Education: D'aontaigh an Roinn le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair gur chóir go n-athmheasfaí an scéim le haghaidh Artigarvan Primary School ó thaobh riachtanas na ndaltaí sa cheantar níos leithne de lena chinntiú go mbeidh cur chuige straitéiseach ann ar phleanáil.

To ensure a strategic approach to planning, the Department has agreed with the Western Education and Library Board that the scheme for Artigarvan Primary School should be reassessed in the context of the needs of pupils in the wider area. My Department awaits a response from the Western Education and Library Board.

Mr Bresland: In light of the review of current capital projects, we need to be reassured that the building work at Artigarvan Primary School will not be further delayed. The community's genuine concern is that the Minister is obsessed with the promotion of Irish-language schools and that those schools are being given priority and funding even when greater need exists elsewhere. Can she say how many Irish-language schools will be affected by the review of current capital projects?

The Minister of Education: It is regrettable that a Member attacks Irish-language schools. I hope that he is not saying that Irish-language schools and their pupils do not deserve equality. I treat all our school sectors on the basis of equality.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister of Education elaborate on why the board needs to consider the wider area in this matter?

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat as an gceist sin. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach sócmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóirí a bhaint amach.

In the current economic climate, we need to ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for all children and the maximum value for the taxpayer. Therefore, it is important that we validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable and

sustainable in the long term. The long-term enrolment calculation that will determine the size of a new Artigarvan primary school has shown a recent pattern of decline; there is also decline in enrolments at another local controlled school. The Department, therefore, is agreed with the Western Education and Library Board that it is timely to look at the wider-area picture in accordance with area-planning considerations and in view of the sustainable schools policy criteria.

Mr B McCrea: I want to press the Minister: does she not recognise the trauma that is experienced by children and teachers in schools that were promised newbuilds but which have had them taken away? It is outrageous. Those pupils will have left school before the Minister gets round to building new schools. She needs to get rid of the red tape in her Department and to start to make decisions.

The Minister of Education: No newbuilds have been taken away from any schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

School Inspections

7. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Education if she plans to review the schools inspection process in light of recent experience at Crumlin Integrated Primary School. (AQO 1153/10)

The Minister of Education: Creidim gur chóir go bhfaigheadh gach páiste oideachas ardchaighdeáin. Is é ról na cigireachta ná a chinntiú gurb amhlaidh an cás.

Every child should receive a high-quality education, and it is the inspectorate's role to help to ensure that that is the case. The inspectorate produces independent reports, and the Department takes appropriate action where necessary. Inspection processes are reviewed annually, and new models of inspection are piloted and consulted on with the relevant educational stakeholders. The inspectorate publishes a wide range of materials to support schools in becoming more self-evaluative in their work and in helping them to be confident and empowered and to demonstrate the good work that they do.

I considered much of the press coverage of recent adverse inspections to be sensational and offensive. It took no account of the feelings of the teachers, other staff and pupils in the

schools concerned. What those schools need is time, space and the appropriate support to address the important issues that were identified in the inspections.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer, although it did not really touch on the problem of publishing the report before the governors had had a chance. Keeping Crumlin Integrated Primary School in mind, does the Minister agree that we need a thorough review of a situation in which the Department, boards and inspectors call the shots but legal responsibility remains with the governors?

The Minister of Education: Cuirim an-luach ar fad ar an obair a dhéanann gobharnóirí scoile.

I greatly value the work of school governors, which is done voluntarily, and I appreciate that they give of their time unstintingly to support schools. I am assured by the education and library boards and by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools that the extensive training that they provide for governors enjoys high levels of attendance. However, there is a need for further training of governors, particularly in light of the new policies that we have brought forward, one of which is Every School a Good School.

3.15 pm

I know that the Member is not telling me that the Department should not take action where action is necessary. Governors tell me that their role is complex and demanding but ultimately rewarding. The Department recognises the significance of the responsibility carried by governors. Therefore, when a school receives a less than satisfactory inspection report, the Department may strengthen the management of the school through the appointment of additional governors.

The question is about a specific school, and I will not comment in the House about specific schools and inspection reports. This is not the place for that. Suffice it to say that my Department will work very closely with any of the schools in the formal intervention process. It is essential that the press understand the importance of that policy and not sensationalise it in the disgraceful way that they did.

Newbuild Projects

8. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister of Education how many newbuild projects will start in this financial year. (AQO 1154/10)

The Minister of Education: I intend to make maximum use of the funding available, which will be used to complete seven projects that are on site. The investment of £101 million in 2010-11 includes newbuild projects at the Belfast Boys' Model School, Grosvenor Grammar School, St Cecilia's College and St Mary's College in Derry, St Mary's Primary School in Portglenone, St Joseph's Primary School in Carryduff and Ballysillan Youth Club. In addition, seven major capital projects, with a projected total capital spend of £18.3 million in 2010-11, are under construction. They include Magherafelt High School, where £6.9 million will be invested in that year; Lisbellaw Primary School; and St Patrick's and St Brigid's Primary School in Ballycastle.

Is maith atá a fhios agam go ndéanann tógáil scoile nua difríocht shuntasach, ní amháin do pháistí agus do thuismitheoirí ach don phobal níos leithne fosta, agus bheadh súil agam go bhféadfainn roinnt tionscadal nua caipitil a fhógairt níos moille i mbliana.

I am acutely aware that the building of any new school makes a significant difference, not only to the children but to the teachers and the wider community. I hope to release a number of new capital projects later in the year. I want to build new schools, and I want more resources to do so. I look forward to support from the Education Committee and every party in the House when I bring forward new proposals.

Mr Storey: Aye, right.

The Minister of Education: I see that the Chairperson of the Education Committee is laughing at that. I hope that that does not mean that he will not support me when I do that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Order. I have already asked Members to make all their remarks through the Chair. I repeat that.

Mrs Bradley, I apologise for this.

Mrs M Bradley: I have had great concerns for many years, 10 and 11 years in some cases, about schools that should have been rebuilt a long time ago and are still not rebuilt. Will those

schools be given priority when the Minister gets around to building some new schools for our children?

The Minister of Education: It is a bit rich for the Member to say that no new schools have been built. I have talked about the 39 major capital builds that we have done since I came into office. That cost £250 million-odd. I have also talked about the 16 capital builds currently on site. I do not know what city the Member lives in, but she should look at the cranes where schools are being built in the city of Derry.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Ms J McCann: I feel that I am back in school and no one is listening to the teacher. No one is listening to you today, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Will the Minister outline the impact of having to find savings of £22 million on the 2010-11 capital build budget?

The Minister of Education: The capital build budget covers a range of areas. In addition to major new works, it includes youth projects, school transport, early years and minor works. The reduction of £22 million in our capital budget for schools will undoubtedly mean that not all projects will go ahead in the time frame planned.

Is tábhachtach go mbeidh ár n-infheistiú in eastát na scoileanna inmharthana inbhuanaithe san fhadtéarma agus go gcloífidh sé lenár ndualgais reachtúla um chomhionannas agus um spriocdhírú ar bhonn riachtanas cuspóireach.

It will be essential that our investment in the schools estate is viable and sustainable in the long term, and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of need.

Ms Lo: Nine years ago, Lagan College was promised an extension to its building. Will the Minister confirm today whether that project will go ahead this year?

The Minister of Education: As I said in response to previous questions, we are doing everything that we can. I have visited Lagan College. It does very important work. It is a very important project, and I want to see it going ahead.

Mr Storey: Nine years.

Ms S Ramsey: Your Government were in charge and did not vote for it.

Mr Storey: Nine years.

Mr A Maskey: What have you done about it?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 9 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Mr Storey: Nine years.

Mr A Maskey: What have you done about it apart from mutter in the Chamber?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Some Members are going to force me into a situation that I do not want to get into. This is a final warning: there are to be no more remarks across the Floor.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are no points of order during Question Time.

Ministerial Meetings

11. **Mr Bell** asked the Minister of Education to outline her policy on meeting representatives of education interest groups. (AQO 1157/10)

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My policy is to endeavour to meet as many groups with an educational interest as possible and as diary commitments permit.

Mr Bell: Will the Minister acknowledge that there is a democratic deficit in the South Eastern Education and Library Board? Those of us who were commissioners and followed the advice of the Minister's late colleague Michael Ferguson and did not impose the cuts were replaced by commissioners who earned £500 a day. Will the Minister confirm that she is still paying the commissioners £500 each a day? What is her policy to remove the democratic deficit and to put some local accountability back into education?

The Minister of Education: My policy is to bring forward the education and skills authority. I very much look forward to support from the Members opposite in that regard. The education and skills authority is about raising standards and getting money to the front line.

I pay tribute to my late colleague Michael Ferguson, who did tremendous work in education. I ask the Member not to try to score political points from the death of my colleague, who worked

with direct rule Ministers here. It is not nice that that was done in the House today.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that £58,000 of the vast expenditure on those commissioners would be better spent on the I CAN early years centre in Ballynahinch? If that is not funded this year, 20 youngsters will be deprived of the speech and language therapy that they need and deserve. There is a queue of another 53 people who are waiting to get into that school.

The Minister of Education: The question was not about the I CAN early years centre, but, as it was raised, I will give an update to the Member. As he knows, I visited the I CAN early years centre. I have seen the invaluable work that it does for young children. The I CAN early years centre provides speech and language services to up to 20 preschool children and support for parents. In 2009-2010, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provided £80,000, with the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) providing £8,000, for the centre. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust recently advised the education and library board that it could no longer contribute to the funding of the I CAN centre due to financial pressures.

I have written to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explore how providers of health and education services can continue to work together to ensure that the needs of children with speech, language and communication difficulties are met. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has a statutory responsibility to identify and to make provision for children with special educational needs. It is best placed to identify and to respond to local needs, and it is funded by my Department to do so.

In the current financial year, the block grant to the SEELB is £78.7 million. I have asked the South Eastern Education and Library Board to advise me of its strategy to meet the needs of all children in the board area with speech, language and communication difficulties in early years. I very much look forward to my meeting with Michael McGimpsey to discuss the funding of that centre by the Health Department and the board. Go raibh maith agat.

Free School Meals

12. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education how she intends to fund the extension of entitlement to free school meals. (AQO 1158/10)

The Minister of Education: As part of the budget allocations for education services for 2010-11, I am delighted that I have been able to make available an additional £3 million to extend the free school meal criteria. Families with children in full-time nursery places and/or primary schools in receipt of working tax credit and with a taxable income below £16,190 will now be able to ensure that their children receive a nutritious meal in the middle of the day. That provision will be introduced on a phased basis over two years.

Má tá teaghlaigh i dteideal béilí saora scoile, tá siad i dteideal tairbhí eile, lena n-áirítear deontais éidí scoile, agus mholfaínn do gach teaghlach ísealioncaim a lántéidlfócht a éiliú. Cuimsíonn an cistiú breise de £3 mhilliún gné bheag chun é seo a chumhdach.

Eligibility for free school meals also entitles families to other benefits, including school uniform grants. I encourage all lower income families to claim their full entitlement. According to our research, up to 20,000 children could be eligible for the new programme.

Ms S Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's answer and the additional money, and I take on board the fact that it will be a gateway to other benefits, including school uniform grants. Considering some of the earlier questions, will any of the money come through the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Investing for Health strategy? Part of ensuring that young people get a better start in life is entitlement to free school meals at primary school. I am curious about whether the Health Department is stepping up to the mark through Investing for Health.

The Minister of Education: I am not aware of Health Department support for the programme. I brought forward the proposals as part of the budgetary process, which was a difficult one. Members will know that I am enormously interested in preschool and primary school education and, despite difficult times, I managed to get more money — £90 per child — into primary schools. We want to make sure that children are not disadvantaged at a young age, so that is good news. I would like

more money, and I will always fight for more resources to provide services at the point of need. Nevertheless, it is to be welcomed that up to 20,000 children will be eligible for free school meals over the next number of years. That is significant, and I look forward to it. It is important that health and education providers work together, whether on the I CAN early years centre or on other areas, and I look forward to working with my colleague in the Health Department.

Mr McDevitt: We all welcome the increased provision of free school meals. Does the Minister accept that there are children in deprived and vulnerable communities across the North who are suffering because of the 70% — more than £2 million — reduction in the community youth work budget? Does the Minister agree that she is robbing Peter to pay Paul?

The Minister of Education: Those statistics are totally inaccurate. I will send the Member correct figures. There is not a 70% reduction in the community youth work budget. The Member should be very careful before giving out wrong statistics.

GCSE Results

13. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils attained at least five GCSE passes in each year since 2006-07. (AQO 1159/10)

The Minister of Education: The number of pupils who obtained at least five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to C has increased by seven percentage points, from 64% in 2006-07 to 71% in 2008-09. That is a direct result of our policies — Every School a Good School and transfer 2010 — and our changes to the curriculum.

Cé go léiríonn na figiúirí go bhfuil na leibhéil tearcghnóthachtála ag feabhsú, tá mé tiomanta do dhul i ngleic le tearcghnóthachtáil agus do thorthaí a fheabhsú do gach duine óg.

The figures indicate improving levels of achievement. We can never become complacent, and I am committed to tackling underachievement and to improving outcomes for all young people, which is why I am putting in place a range of policies that are aimed at ensuring that every child fulfils her or his potential. Nevertheless, it is good to see that an extra 1,500 young people

are staying on in post-primary schools after the age of 16.

3.30 pm

Mr P Maskey: I congratulate the Department of Education, the Minister and the many teachers involved in helping so many young people achieve five or more GCSEs. The figure that the Minister just quoted is fantastic. Are she and her Department putting in the work required to ensure that Every School a Good School will lead to the numbers continuing to increase year on year?

The Minister of Education: Absolutely. We are continuing with our policies and being very proactive. Thankfully, as a result of the revised curriculum in primary schools, we no longer have distortion in the curriculum there, so we are already seeing improvements. Gone are the days when some children sat at the front of the class and others at the back. The curriculum is no longer distorted.

We also have a new, much broader, more varied and stimulating post-primary curriculum — the entitlement framework. That is one of the reasons that we are seeing improvements. We are putting an enormous focus on literacy and numeracy, mathematics and English or Irish, depending on which language is the chosen medium for learning.

In 2008, around 10,000 children left school without having achieved at least five good GCSEs. In 2007, the figure was 11,000; in 2006, it was 12,000. Therefore, a welcome downward trend can be seen. However, as I said, we can never become complacent. My Department will not get complacent. We must achieve much higher numbers, because every child who leaves our schools without the necessary qualifications is a child who has not reached his or her full potential.

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 2, 4, 6 and 7 have been withdrawn.

Universities and Colleges: Advertising

1. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what budgetary controls are in place to ensure that universities and colleges

do not overspend on advertising and promotion literature. (AQO 1162/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning

(Sir Reg Empey): Spending on advertising and promotional literature covers items such as promotional literature to attract students and to promote an institution's facilities; advertising of staff vacancies; advertising of tenders and procurement opportunities; and the production of the annual prospectus and other corporate reports and material. Expenditure on those areas represents less than 1% of total spend in the higher education sector.

Higher education institutions have budgetary and financial control frameworks in place, within which the budgets for advertising and promotional literature, as well as other areas of expenditure, are controlled. The controls are subject to periodic review by an institution's internal auditor. Expenditure is also subject to review by the external auditor. Further education colleges operate a regular and comprehensive formal monitoring process.

Overall budgetary spend is approved by colleges' governing bodies. Spend in specific areas, including on advertising and promotion, is continually scrutinised at senior management level. Spend is also subject to the same audit reviews that are applied in the higher education sector.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer and for the figures that he provided. My question was posed by young people at a recent meeting of students. Does the Minister agree that, when it comes to advertising and promotion, greater emphasis should be placed on online and IT measures than on glossies, with their associated costs?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

First, we must obviously always be careful that public funds are spent on only their intended purposes. However, we must promote places in colleges and universities, and that requires the production of appropriate literature. If the Member is concerned about the production of over-elaborate or inappropriate material, I am happy to take that up with the relevant institution. I believe that sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure that colleges and universities constantly review such spending. As I said in my original answer, all such spending is subject to internal and external auditing.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that if a wide range of courses is to be retained at our universities and colleges to the benefit of our economy, it is essential that we attract and retain sustainable numbers of our able young people?

Furthermore, does he accept that it will be a danger to the economy if quality local courses are not available? It is essential that young people are well informed and that as many of them as possible take up local opportunities and avoid the additional costs of travelling or living elsewhere.

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I agree with the Member. Obviously, it is important that people have access to a wide range of courses. However, they need to know about them because courses continually change. Therefore, there has to be a means of communicating that. Obviously, it is cheaper to make the information available on the Internet than publishing literature, and so on. However, people need to make the effort to find out about the courses.

Members may recall the Department's C'mon Over campaign, which we have been running for some time. It was designed to try to encourage students to come back to study at our universities. It is important that colleges and universities do their business properly, effectively and in an attractive manner, otherwise students will not go to those institutions.

Graduate Unemployment

2. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department has undertaken to address unemployment among new graduates.

(AQO 1163/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Unemployment has been increasing as a result of the economic downturn. As part of that, it is expected that graduate unemployment has also risen. However, my Department has not yet been inundated by graduates seeking work or availing themselves of the opportunities that are offered through its programmes. That may well be attributed to the resilience or the transferability of the graduates' skill sets.

In addition to access to my Department's existing programmes and services for adults, I introduced a number of initiatives that are

specifically aimed at helping graduates to find employment. I trust that the Member will agree that that is an encouraging development.

Mr Armstrong: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he tell us whether he believes that the recession has artificially inflated the statistics for those who are not in education, employment or training?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

It would be foolish to deny that the recession has had an impact. Job opportunities are fewer and, in such circumstances, competition for a diminishing number of posts is higher. The Member will be aware that, compared with two years ago, 32,000 more people in Northern Ireland are unemployed. That includes a number of graduates.

My Department has schemes, including the job introduction scheme, details of which are on the Department's website. The Member will also know that we are considering internships, and so on, to try to help graduates to find work. Sadly, not all of them are able to find the work for which they are best trained. Many of them have been resilient and have had to go into jobs for which they are overqualified. I am sure that we can all think of such examples in our own constituencies. Nevertheless, we are keeping close contact with that cohort, because many of those young people are the seedcorn of our economic development for the future and will always have to be monitored extremely closely.

Mr Bell: How many more people will be made unemployed as a result of the Minister and Mr Cameron's proposals to introduce a £200 million cut this financial year? How many more of our public sector teachers, doctors, nurses and physiotherapists is he planning to hand P45s come Friday morning?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Anyone in the Chamber could have made a better effort than that. The fact is that the Member's party's Finance Minister has just led us through £376 million worth of cuts. Unless the Member is economically illiterate, the first paragraph that he will see if he reads his party's manifesto states that spending reductions are better and preferable to tax rises. I understand spending reductions to mean cuts.

Mr Bell: How many P45s?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. This is in danger of becoming a party political broadcast, which we will try to avoid.

Programme-led Apprenticeships

3. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has reviewed the programme-led apprenticeships scheme and to outline the outcome.

(AQO 1164/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The programme-led apprenticeships scheme was introduced in September 2009 and has been the subject of continuous monitoring. That has meant that the staff who are involved in liaising with stakeholders have been able to identify issues of concern early and bring forward solutions for consideration. One specific problem identified through that process is that training organisations have been able to secure employer placements for around only 50% of the 2,798 participants on the programme. That has severely restricted participants' ability to gather the work-based evidence that is required to achieve the NVQ element of their apprenticeship framework.

The solution being considered is to increase the number of placement days allowed in the programme from one day a week to a maximum of three days a week, together with a more flexible use of block placements. There is evidence that that would increase the number of placements available, by making them more meaningful to employers as well as to participants.

Mr P Maskey: I thank the Minister for his reply. He accepts that there is a need to increase the figures, given the statistics that he has just quoted. Will he outline what consultation has taken place between the colleges and employers? Will the Minister regard it as a mistake if such consultation has not taken place?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: We dealt with that issue on a number of occasions in debates and in Question Time. Nobody doubts for one moment that the employer-led schemes are the best. There is common ground in the House on that. Last year, however, we were confronted with a situation where employers were not providing apprenticeships in the numbers that they had been in the past. We decided that the best measure that we

could take was to introduce the programme-led apprenticeships schemes. Young people have voted with their feet, and almost 3,000 are involved in those schemes.

We have been working very closely with employers and the sector skills councils to ensure that we do not undermine the employer-led apprenticeship model. We have had extensive discussions with the Department, the sector skills councils and training organisations, and it has been agreed that a more flexible approach to the employer placements that I have outlined will be adopted in respect of those young people who are on the programme-led apprenticeships programme. The changes will take place with immediate effect. I thank the Committee for its active contribution to dialogue on that important issue.

Ms Lo: The Minister will be aware that the Committee had a meeting with the programme's stakeholders. The employers were unhappy about extending the programme to two or three days a week, because, first, as the Minister said, it may undermine the employer-led programme; and, secondly, there is not enough work to justify taking people on, let alone extending their placements to two or three days. A while ago, departmental staff talked about extending the placements to the public sector and related agencies that are funded by the public sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member ask her question?

Ms Lo: What progress has been made on that issue?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I understand what employers are saying, but the fact is that employers are not taking on apprentices in the numbers that we have been used to. Some of the bigger employers have slashed the number of people that they are taking on, and, last year, one very large employer did not take on any apprentices. We are, therefore, confronted with that dilemma, and we have had this debate before. A small group of employers continue to keep lobbying on the issue, but employers are simply not providing the places. Almost 3,000 young people have taken up programme-led apprenticeships. What were we to do with those young people? Were we to leave them there and give them nothing? That is the dilemma.

I have written to my Executive colleagues about extending the placements to the public sector, and, so far, I have had a positive response.

I believe that we will see the gradual involvement of apprentices with the public sector. However, I repeat that I fully accept and support the view that the employer-led scheme is the best, and we will get back to that situation as soon as we can. We are monitoring the scheme continuously, and we will have to decide very shortly what to do in the autumn, because it is fast approaching. Although people are continuing to lobby on the issue by extending the options from one day up to a maximum of three days, the feedback that we are getting is that it may lead to an increase in the number of placements. That is the result of our discussions with the organisations and the sector skills councils, and I remind Members that the sector skills councils are there to represent employers. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating, but, hitherto, we have said that it was too inflexible, so we have made it more flexible. We will have to see if that results in more work placements being found, because, at the end of the day, the key objective is to get people work placements so that they can deal with the NVQ element of their apprenticeship framework.

Mr A Maginness: I support the Minister in his replies. I think that he is going in the right direction in a situation wherein employers simply do not have additional capacity. Will the Minister encourage employers to think again, and will he continue to expand looking at the public service to see where programme-led apprenticeships can be taken up? Can he assure the House that he will continue along that path?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am happy to give that assurance. I agree with the Member: the public service has a huge responsibility in those matters. We understand the difficulties; however, without more placements people will not get the NVQ element of their apprenticeship framework. They will be able to come back to that when an opportunity arises, so it does not mean that it is lost for ever. However the answer is an emphatic yes.

NEETs

5. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's plans

to deal with the issue of young people not in education, employment or training.(AQO 1166/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Has question 5 been grouped with another question?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I apologise. I should have said that question 4 has been withdrawn, so we are now on question 5.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Young people not in education, employment or training are a high priority for me. That is why the Department is taking the lead and producing a scoping study, which is in the final editing stages and should be completed very soon. However, it is clear from this work that the issues affecting those young people are cross-departmental and multiagency in nature. For example, in 2007-08, some 80·1% of young people who left school in year 12 did not receive five GCSEs at grades A to C, including English and maths. That represented 8,046 young people of the 10,050 who left school. The need to improve educational attainment is a key component of any work to prevent young people from falling into inactivity; indeed, there is a strong argument for even earlier intervention. A wide range of provision is available depending on the needs of the individual; however, we are not complacent, and the development of a strategy will inform future provision.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for the interest that he and his Department have taken in apprenticeships for young people. How do Northern Ireland's figures for NEETs compare with those of the rest of the United Kingdom?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The fact is that, currently, Northern Ireland's figures are slightly better than those of the rest of the UK, although, as the Member will be aware, there are variations from region to region. Those figures are classified into bands according to the age groups to which they refer. As I understand it, Northern Ireland's situation is marginally less bad than that of the rest of the UK. However, I must point out that that makes little or no difference to me or to the Department. Certainly, it makes little or no difference to individuals who are confronted with the problems that arise from it.

There are many reasons for that. Although some people make lifestyle decisions to come back into the workforce or into a training situation, others are left in a much more vulnerable position.

That deals with family issues and break-ups. Of course, historically, as we know, there has been a correlation between rising unemployment and rising numbers of young people, in particular, who find themselves in that situation. It is a terrible waste. The Assembly and the Executive must address that effectively because when people have passed a certain age, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to get the basic skills that they need to have a worthwhile and meaningful career.

Mrs M Bradley: Many people who are not in education, employment or training may have learning difficulties or a history of disrupted schooling and difficult family backgrounds. Will the Minister tell the House what is being considered to address essential skills and pastoral care needs?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Work on essential skills is progressing. There is a Programme for Government target, which we are well on the way to achieving.

I believe that, during the past number of years, tens of thousands of people have acquired essential skills. In September 2009, we added ICT as a third essential skill. It is proving to be effective in getting people to come forward to participate in essential skills learning because — how shall I put it? — people do not feel embarrassed to go and learn about computers, although they may have difficulty with saying that they cannot read or write. That is proving effective at getting across barriers. Few processes in modern business and industry can take place without some use of ICT. We are working closely with the Union Learning Fund, which, during the past year, has been effective in getting more and more people, even those who are in their forties and fifties, to participate in those processes.

I am encouraged that we are beginning to see an upward trend in the number of participants and in the success to which that will lead. I will provide some statistics for the Member. The most recent data covers 16- to 24-year-olds. The proportion of those not in employment, government training schemes or full-time education in the period between October and December 2009 stands at 15%. That is a decrease of four percentage points from the figure for October to December 2008. It is the lowest rate of all UK regions for that particular quarter, the final quarter of 2009. It

is encouraging that we may, at last, be seeing a turn of the tide.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 6 and 7 have been withdrawn.

STEM Subjects

8. Mr Bell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made in promoting STEM subjects. (AQO 1169/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: A strong cadre of people who are skilled in STEM subjects is critical if the local economy is to meet its full potential. Since the publication of the independent report of the STEM review, which was received by Minister Ruane and I in September 2009, significant work has been undertaken to address its recommendations and promote STEM subjects.

For example, in my Department, a feasibility study into the possibility of providing a bursary and scholarship to those who study STEM subjects in further and higher education colleges in Northern Ireland is almost complete. The six further education colleges have engaged in a wide range of activities that is aimed specifically at increasing participation in STEM subjects, including an all-day event that took place on Saturday 1 May 2010 at W5, which I was pleased to attend.

The event, in conjunction with employers, included primary and secondary schools and focused on creating greater enthusiasm for STEM subjects as a cornerstone of economic growth.

Mr Bell: Given that we are agreed on the importance of science, technology, engineering and maths not only to be resilient in recession but to advance Northern Ireland's economy, how can the Minister explain his failure, as the number of graduates in those subjects has reduced under his watch? Does he accept that that failure will stultify the economy?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The decisions that people take on the courses that they pursue are voluntary; those who want to force others to take a particular degree will receive no support from me. People must be free to make their own choices.

The Department's approach is to make STEM subjects more attractive to students and others. We must bear in mind that the decisions made

by young people on the subjects that they study at 13 or 14 years of age often determine their ability to study different degrees when they go to university. That is why young people are encouraged to take STEM subjects long before they make the choice to go to university.

As the Member will be aware, one institution offers a bursary for students studying STEM subjects, and there is already some signs of an increased interest in those subjects. The STEM review and the campaign run by institutions, schools and bodies such as the Royal Society of Chemistry to attract more people to STEM subjects is undoubtedly the best method of promoting them: one must allow people to volunteer to participate rather than force them to do so. It does not work like that. I do not believe that anyone in the House would agree to draconian measures to force people in a direction that they did not wish to go.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his replies. Will he outline how reliant the STEM agenda is on changes in attitude to STEM subjects in our wider education system?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: That is the key: the culture must change. There was a tendency for people to enter universities and colleges and opt for what were deemed safe professions such as accountancy and law; however, in a changing world those professions are no longer as safe as they once were. Furthermore, millions of graduates in engineering and other fields are emanating from Asia, which is the new powerhouse of future development, and if we do not wake up to that we will miss out on our long-term competitiveness. We must provide encouragement in our schools and at other levels if we are to get the participation that we need to make it work.

One of the most successful schemes has been the Department's Step-Up programme at the University of Ulster, which encourages pupils from secondary schools in disadvantaged areas of Londonderry and Belfast to study science at university. The programme has been running successfully for eight years and actively involves the university, schools, local industry, hospitals and government agencies. I had the pleasure of going to a ceremony in Jordanstown in the autumn at which 80 young people who had been on the scheme were beginning their university courses, and I am looking closely at

whether that scheme can be expanded into new locations to ensure that more people can study STEM subjects.

4.00 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that approximately 12,000 students from the North are studying outside Northern Ireland, does the Minister agree that there is an opportunity to radically increase the number of students who are studying STEM subjects here? That would, in itself, require an uplift of the cap on the number of students. Will the Minister outline whether a case has been made to the Department of Finance and Personnel for an uplift of the MaSN cap? If so, what was the response?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member will be aware that what is nicknamed the MaSN cap is an expenditure control mechanism. It creates arbitrary decisions, because, clearly, MaSN is a means of controlling the number of people who are at university. Very roughly, every 1,000 students cost us an additional £8 million. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of students in higher education. I have told the universities that I am prepared to talk to them about the MaSN cap. Indeed, I have some proposals from the University of Ulster, as this matter applies to the Magee campus, for example. We are looking at how the cap is applied, and, indeed, I am always prepared to look at that. However, the CSR period for the next three years begins during the current financial year, and that will be our first opportunity to build something additional for this matter into future budgets and to make any significant change.

I am always open to looking at the situation, and I have said that consistently to the universities. We have reached the stage where roughly half our school leavers go into higher education. Therefore, we have achieved a level that is greater than anywhere else on these islands, especially as that level applies to people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. That is a good story to tell for Northern Ireland.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately 10 minutes.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am grateful that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is in the Chamber. Perhaps the timing of the debate is not ideal, given that it is late on the Tuesday afternoon before the Thursday Westminster election. Nonetheless, I will make my case.

Carrickmore Health Centre is a four-GP practice that provides primary care services to almost 8,500 patients in a rural area in County Tyrone. The health centre is located approximately 15 miles from each of the larger towns of Omagh, Cookstown and Dungannon. The practice serves a wide geographical area that is relatively deprived. According to the 2005 NISRA multiple deprivation measure, the Termon ward, with the existing health centre at its centre, has a multiple deprivation measure of 190 out of 890. Additional trust services, such as midwifery, health visiting and district nursing, are provided from the premises.

As I understand it, the former Sperrin Lakeland Trust provided the current premises at a cost of around £140,000 in 1984. A bomb in 1985 caused major damage to the premises, and the health centre was refurbished and extended. When the initial premises were developed, there were two doctors, a treatment room nurse and three receptionists serving fewer than 6,000 patients, and they did that well. Currently, there are four doctors, two nurses, one healthcare assistant, a practice manager and six receptionists. Two health visitors, two visiting midwives and a district nursing team also provide services from the premises. The practice list has grown to almost 8,500 patients.

Significant developments in service provision have been undertaken by the practice in recent

years, such as chronic disease management clinics, minor surgery, health promotion and preventative services. I live in that community, and I am a patient of that practice: that may be an interest that I should declare. In my opinion, it is a very progressive health centre.

The changing face of secondary care services in the area has had a massive impact on the practice and its patients. When the current premises were developed, the practice was within 20 minutes of acute services at Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh, and the South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon, and it was 35 minutes from the Mid-Ulster Hospital in Magherafelt. With the regrading of those facilities in recent years, patients of the practice are now further away from accessing acute services than perhaps anyone else in the region. There are tragic examples of the impact that that has had, although I will not indulge those today. However, it has undoubtedly resulted in an increased demand on the practice in Carrickmore to deliver additional services locally.

The current premises are rented from the Western Health and Social Care Trust, formerly the Sperrin Lakeland Trust. Inevitably, the trust has capital restrictions and priorities, and it is evident that the maintenance and development of trust-owned premises cannot respond to need to the extent that the GP-owned premises in the locality can. For example, last year, Dr Michael Herron, one of the GPs in the practice, told me that £5,000 per practice was provided to GP-owned premises in the trust area to upgrade infection control but not to trust-owned premises. Two-tier provision therefore applies in that trust area in that patients in trust-owned premises do not have the same entitlement to protection from infections such as MRSA and clostridium difficile. Inadequate maintenance and development has also resulted in more than 10 call-outs to the trust in the past year following failure of the electrical supply to the premises resulting in an inability to operate the computer system, emergency phone lines and emergency equipment until technicians arrived from Omagh. Countless problems such as those have been ongoing for many years now.

The practice has been applying to develop modern, fit-for-purpose premises to provide an enhanced range of services for the practice since 1996. In that time, numerous major cost-rent premises have been developed in areas such as Enniskillen and the Waterside

in Derry, which quite literally have hospitals on their doorstep. We believe that the needs of patients in mid-Tyrone and particularly in the Carrickmore area have been overlooked somewhat, despite what local people feel are the unique circumstances of the area with regard to secondary care access.

The practice engaged constructively with the then Western Board, most notably in 2003, when a business case was developed for additional accommodation at Carrickmore Health Centre, and in 2005, when a major health and care centre was prioritised for Carrickmore following extensive needs analysis for primary care in the Western Trust area. That was an important time, when there were public meetings in the area and consultations with the Western Board. People are extremely disappointed that it appears, following that, to have slipped in priority status.

Despite the challenges of the location, access to secondary care and premises, the Carrickmore practice has been highly successful. The practice has consistently achieved among the highest point scores in the new GMS contract since its inception. It also has piloted highly successful initiatives, such as teledermatology and teleneurology. It has contributed to the development of leading Western Trust services, such as the cardiac unit based at the Tyrone County Hospital and community cardiac services, and trust-wide protocols, such as the trust stroke protocol. All in all, the practice has won many regional healthcare awards and, generally, is perceived as a progressive health centre that is committed to achieving the best service for its patients. It believes that it can develop even higher standards of enhanced primary care provision in enhanced premises, and that is its objective and goal.

The practice doctors are fully aware of and understand the financial pressures and limitations facing the trust and the Department with respect to capital developments. They believe that it is sensible to invest in the practice and that it would be a false economy not to do so. As an MLA, I am aware that we all want the health budget slice of the cake to be much larger. At this time, the Health Department secures approximately 50% of the overall Budget for 12 Departments, and I support that. We believe strongly that the development of enhanced primary care premises for the Carrickmore practice population can be

achieved by using existing resources. That will provide the Department and the Western Trust with an opportunity to enhance service provision in primary care for patients in Carrickmore; alleviate some of the pressures that the trust faces in respect of secondary care by enhancing community provision; and help overcome some of the issues faced by patients because of the distance they must travel to the emergency and acute hospital services.

I am grateful to the Minister for acceding to a request to meet me, other public representatives, local GPs and community representatives from the west Tyrone area on Thursday 20 May. We hope to continue this dialogue at that meeting. I ask the Minister to give fair wind to our proposal. I invite him to visit the premises in Carrickmore, if he thinks that that will be helpful or necessary, so that he can see that they are not fit for purpose for the future. For a start, the building is too small. However, the new services that could be located there would certainly contribute to a health solution for a community that feels disenfranchised in that way. At the meeting, we will discuss possible options and solutions, one of which is the development of new premises under the cost-rent system to provide enhanced GP and community services.

I emphasise that the Carrickmore practice has been able to generate huge prescribing savings from its projected budget, amounting to more than £250,000 per annum. Facilitating a proportion of such savings in subsequent years to support new enhanced premises for the practice population would be an appropriate acknowledgement of patients' support for the efficient use of resources. In the absence of that funding, things will be very difficult in the future, especially as so much emphasis is placed on the importance of primary care. We are told that more than 90% of health transactions are carried out in a primary care setting. The population of that large rural area in mid-Tyrone has a number of options and solutions that it wishes to present to the Minister. I repeat my request to the Minister that he gives the fairest possible wind to the proposal. I hope that he does not rebut it with a prepared answer but gives serious consideration to the needs of people in that community.

I know that the doctors, staff and patients of that health centre, who are supported by public and community representatives, will be grateful to the Minister and Department for giving

thorough consideration to the unique healthcare needs of that area and for supporting them in their collective efforts to deliver a proper health service for that community. I hope that the Minister considers the proposal properly.

4.15 pm

Dr Deeny: Do I have five minutes in which to speak?

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have up to 10 minutes.

Dr Deeny: I reiterate Barry's comment that it is good of the Minister to be here. I declare an interest as a GP in the Carrickmore practice. However, I must speak on the issue, because I am the political representative of the patients of that practice and others in the area. I will try to refer to "the practice" and "the patients", as opposed to reflecting any personal interest.

Rather than going over what Barry said about the practice, I will simply say that it is well known as being one of high quality, for which I am thankful. The annual patient surveys confirm that, and Barry mentioned the high scores received by the practice and the new contract. I remember that, 15 years ago, we were bottom of the 59 practices in the Western Trust area when it came to prescribing. However, over the past number of years, we have been placed consistently in the top three. The scores apply to prescribing habits and, for example, to the cost per patient and per item. Generic prescribing has dramatically increased; more than 60% of our prescriptions are now generic. However, I have concerns, and I am glad that the Minister is here to hear them.

Nowadays, we rightly hear about patient choice. However, the practice has, for a variety of reasons, had to turn away patients. Each week, the number of applications ranges from six to 20, which was the highest number that I ever came across. Unfortunately, severely limited space means that we have no choice but to refuse some applicants. We refuse those who live furthest away from the practice centre, which is a pity. As primary care develops into the twenty-first century, we see no reason not to achieve a practice of 10,000 patients. However, we need the facilities to be able to do that.

The loss of acute services in the three adjacent hospitals resulted in increasing demands being made on the practice. It must be recognised that, at times, our patients and those from

other practices whose children attend the local schools use the health centre almost as though it were a miniature A&E department. In 2005, because those acute services had been earmarked for closure, we were told that it was a priority for Carrickmore to have a practice that was fit for the twenty-first century. In 2006, I received a letter from the head of primary care in the then Western Board. He stated:

"The Carrickmore health and care centre remains a high priority in the first phase of schemes to be included in the outline business case. We will do everything we can to push ahead with the Carrickmore scheme so that it is built as quickly as possible."

That was the situation, as we thought, in 2006. We have had a long time to think about it, and the practice believes that that venture could be achieved using the existing resources.

I will talk more about cost, as I have some experience of the construction of new health centres across the water. A year or two back, a local paper mentioned that a new health centre was to be built in Fintona, and a figure of £15 million was bandied around. That would scare anybody off, never mind the Department. In November 2007, I took a group of people over to Scotland to look at hospitals. One of the places that we visited was Fort William, and the people were so excited about their new health centre that they asked us to come and see it. That centre has three practices and caters for 12,000 patients. In May 2007, it opened at a cost of £2.5 million. I saw what a wonderful and modern health centre it was. That was in 2007, which some might say was some years ago, but I heard this morning that costs for construction have gone down. Therefore, to think of the cost of modern day health centres in the tens of millions is wrong, when £2 million to £3 million would cover the cost of such a centre in Carrickmore.

We have been pleased with the prescribing savings in the practice, which are due to the professional commitment of staff and, more importantly, our patients' support, understanding and acceptance. We have been able to save a significant amount of money over the years through savings in prescribing. Those are savings to the healthcare budget and to the Department that could be channelled back into the practice and put towards the cost of developing modern and fit-for-purpose primary care premises for the twenty-first century. I

hope that the Minister and his Department acknowledge that. Many practices are not saving money but are costing the Department money. We are saving money from the Department's healthcare budget and have done so consistently for the past five years. It would be good to have that acknowledged, and an appropriate way to do so would be to reward the efforts of our patients by agreeing to provide us with a new health and care centre.

Those of us who are health professionals and work in the National Health Service are well aware of a major shift from secondary to primary care across all the countries. Those of us who work in community primary care are up for that challenge. Having modern primary care services for our patients and decreasing the demand on our secondary care services makes sense to me and to the vast majority of doctors, nurses and other health professionals in the community. However, it is impossible to do that without having the essential facilities and services in place in our communities. That is important in all areas right across the National Health Service but even more so in mid-Tyrone, where patients are further away from acute hospital services and depend more on their primary care services.

This morning, I met the chief executive of the Western Trust about another issue, along with the medical director, the director of mental health services and another senior director from the trust. I have a good working relationship with the new trust, and I sit as one of the commissioners on the new local commissioning group. That is something that I thought about. I did not take that position for personal benefit; the group is needed for our community.

I honestly believe that the health professionals in Carrickmore have unique problems and difficulties in providing modern day healthcare to our patient population. That provides us with a unique opportunity, which, I hope, the Minister and his Department will grab. That opportunity is to provide twenty-first century primary care services for patients while helping to ease the burden on secondary healthcare in the west. That is a big point, because there is already talk about people having difficulty getting hospital beds, although that is the case across the Health Service. The whole idea of moving care into the community is to look after people in their own home, if that is what they want, and to help our secondary care colleagues.

I will finish by asking the Minister to take on board all the points that have been raised and to accept the unique and difficult situation in which we find ourselves and the unique opportunity that that presents. I ask him to consider us favourably and to make the right decision for our many rural patients who feel that they and their health needs have been forgotten by the Department.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Unlike the previous two contributors, I do not live in Carrickmore, and I am not a patient at the practice that is the subject of the debate. However, I am an MLA for West Tyrone, and Carrickmore is in west Tyrone. I also have an interest as a member of the Health Committee.

The detail of the case was articulated by the two previous contributors. I want to focus on one aspect of what was said; namely, that that practice is in an area of deprivation. I understand from sitting on the Health Committee and from listening to the Minister and all the Budget debates that we have particular difficulties with finance. However, with regard to the point about the practice being in an area of deprivation, it is for the Assembly and, indeed, the Executive to keep in mind in all these discussions the issue of equality and equity across the North. Although we have a problem with finance and budgets — we all accept that — it is important that we keep equality as a baseline when considering where and how money is spent. The point was made by the previous contributors that the people in that area are, in their view, suffering disproportionately because the services there are, perhaps, not the same as those received in other areas. I repeat that I do not live in that area and am not a patient at that practice. However, in general terms, equality should underline all our considerations.

Not far from Carrickmore are areas such as Greencastle, Gortin and Plumbridge, which certainly have been disadvantaged with the change in provision at Omagh hospital. When considering these matters, it is important that we look at the full picture and at what may be provided in west Tyrone in the future. The issue of equality and what is provided in the rural west remain very much a live matter.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I am committed to developing and improving primary and community care services across Northern

Ireland. Such services are vital in helping to reduce the public's dependence on hospitals for treatment and care. Therefore, the points that were made about our change of direction in the Health Service very much accord with my strategic view. I have demonstrated that through a number of measures including, for example, the setting up of the Public Health Agency.

The first point of contact for someone who needs healthcare is often the primary and community care services, which are the cornerstone of our health and care services. A huge range of services are based in the community for people with long-term conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and strokes. Most importantly, that means that people can be treated closer to home and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. Therefore, I very much support the drive towards primary care, which has been part of my strategic vision for health.

4.30 pm

New approaches to chronic disease management have been introduced in the Western Trust area's primary sector. Those include the development of patient education programmes and the employment of specialist community respiratory nurses. It is because of such initiatives that many more people can now benefit from services that are provided in their community, meaning less disruption to their daily lives.

My Department's primary and community care infrastructure programme aims to put in place a physical infrastructure that is integrated, modern and meets the health and care needs of local communities. The programme includes the development of a number of health and care centres across Northern Ireland that will bring health and social care professionals together under one roof and within skilled teams to provide a range of community-based services. That is the programme's focus. A new health and care centre for Carrickmore was originally planned to be a part of that programme. A health and care centre for Lisnaskea was selected as the Western Health and Social Care Trust's first priority. In 2008, I commissioned a capital priorities review, but a health and care centre for Carrickmore was not included in the Western Trust's top 12 priorities.

Demand for our services continues to grow at unprecedented levels, and the growing needs

of patients are placing greater pressures on the system. Despite that, my budget is being cut. I listened with interest to some of the remarks that were made about money, because I want to talk about money and specifically about the role that we all can play in finding money for the Health Service.

Health in Northern Ireland is underfunded by around £600 million per annum when compared with England, even though the need for health and social care services here is between 14% and 16% greater. As well as that, budget cuts are putting us under relentless strain. Two weeks ago, the already limited resources in my health budget were cut by £113 million, on top of my being asked to find £700 million in efficiencies over the next three years. This year alone, I am being asked to find £340 million in efficiencies. After adding up those sums and taking into consideration the fact that Health Service demand rose by 9% last year and 12% the year before while my budget increased by just over 1% in real terms, Members will have some idea of the challenges that our Health Service staff are facing.

It is very difficult. I am constantly being told about the need to be efficient. I have just left the Ulster Hospital, where efficiencies over the past three years have risen by approximately 18%. That is a huge gain, and credit is due to every member of staff in that hospital. However, they are working in a building that is falling down around them in places. It is difficult to be efficient when working in such conditions, and I accept that modern and efficient premises are needed.

We have to invest. In fact, we have to invest to save. Nevertheless, even with those gains in efficiencies — the Health Service overall has gained in efficiency by around 7% over the past two years — the challenge is still so great that Health Service staff continue to be stretched. Our doctors, nurses and health professionals are being stretched all the time. They deserve support from the House and the Executive, but they are not getting it.

Two weeks ago, the budget cuts were voted through by what I describe as the unholy alliance of the DUP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party. I note that Mrs McGill was part of that vote. She voted to cut almost £400 million from departmental budgets and specifically £113 million from the health budget, yet she

talks about equality and equity. Although the Health Service provides universal care for the population — we all need the Health Service routinely during our lives — the bulk of its use is by our older population and children. Most of the burden of health budget cuts will fall on older people and children. I have made that point repeatedly in the Chamber, in the Executive and in public. Where is the equality and equity in that? How can Mrs McGill see equality and equity in voting for those cuts? Her party, along with the DUP and the Alliance Party, voted to take £700 million in efficiencies out of the Health Service. When I asked the House to exempt the Health Service from budget cuts, the same unholy alliance voted to impose cuts on the Health Service. That is why I have to do things like capital reviews.

There is great demand on the Health Service. Kieran Deeny will know that, as a professional working in the Health Service. He will know at first hand how much harder life is for doctors, nurses and professionals in the Health Service and the need that there is for resource.

In December 2008, I announced over £58 million of capital investment for the Western Trust over three years. That was part of a larger planned investment in the trust over a 10-year period. As part of that development, major investment is going into Altnagelvin and into the south-west to the new hospital in Enniskillen, and I have plans for and am committed to building a new local hospital in Omagh. However, it is difficult for me to deliver these things when the Executive and the Assembly will not face up to the needs of the Health Service.

Mr McElduff said that we get 50% of the Budget and that he supports that. We do not get 50% of the Budget or anything like that. There is a wisdom that floats about as a criticism of the Health Service that says that we do, but we do not. We get 43% of the managed block. Members will be aware that the block grant comes in two parts: managed and unmanaged. Around half of that block comes to us, which is managed through the Executive. Around 43% of that block came to health before the devolution of justice. It is now much less than that.

Looking at the moneys that we have for health, one can see how the Treasury does its sums. The Treasury tells us how much money we need compared with England, which is used as a benchmark. It has allowed for health

to get £600 million per annum more than it actually gets to run the service and meet the challenges that Kieran Deeny and others have to meet. That money has been taken off for other Departments. I could name one other Department that is seriously underfunded. It is nothing like as underfunded as the Health Service, but it is underfunded.

It is how we cut up the cake here that is important. If we cut the cake, then we are in a position to deliver a Health Service that is comparable in resource to the rest of the UK. However, in saying that, I believe that the Health Service in Northern Ireland is first class. I have repeatedly been told by professionals that, if one has to be ill, Northern Ireland is a good place to be ill when compared with the rest of the UK. It is certainly a much better place to be ill than, for example, the Irish Republic, where one will pay for one's doctor, prescriptions, accident and emergency services and a stay in hospital.

Mrs McGill: Will the Minister clarify the significance of how we cut up the block grant here? Are we getting enough from the Treasury? Will the Minister confirm that, in his view, we are getting enough or that the block grant needs some adjustment? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up, but I will give him a quick moment to respond.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We always look for more money, but health gets a bad deal as the block grant is cut up here. Health has historically had and continues to have a bad deal. The decisions are made by the unholy alliance of Sinn Féin, the DUP and the Alliance Party. Look at other things: £20 million has been set aside for the development of the Irish language. That would pay for two health centres in Carrickmore, no problem, if that is what the Member wants to prioritise.

Adjourned at 4.39 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 10 May 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill: Second Stage

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

That the Second Stage of the High Hedges Bill [NIA 15/09] be agreed.

The problems caused by high hedges should not be underestimated. To be constantly in the shadow of a neighbouring high hedge can significantly impair a person's enjoyment of his or her property. Furthermore, problems with high hedges can escalate out of all proportion and give rise to ill feeling and tension between neighbours. I am determined, through the Bill, to help to resolve matters and to end disputes about high hedges between neighbours.

A scoping consultation carried out by my Department in 2005 highlighted the fact that problems relating to large evergreen and semi-evergreen hedges were commonplace in all council areas. Most respondents wanted legislation. The Bill introduces a formal system to encourage people to resolve high hedges issues through negotiation and compromise without having to take the more formal route of lodging a complaint.

The Bill contains 20 clauses. I do not intend to comment on every clause, but I would like to highlight the main issues. Clauses 1 and 2 set out the circumstances in which a complaint can be made and define a high hedge for the purposes of the legislation. A complaint can be made by the owner or occupier of a domestic property, and only where the reasonable enjoyment of a property is being adversely affected by the height of a hedge situated in land owned or occupied by another person will a complaint be valid. The Bill is specifically

designed to address the main problem identified in the scoping study, namely dense screens of foliage caused by high hedges of an evergreen or semi-evergreen nature.

Clause 3 sets out the procedure by which councils will process complaints. A complaint must be made to the council whose area contains the land on which the hedge is situated. Councils have discretion to set a fee for the making of a complaint. That is a payment for a service provided to the complainant by the council. It is intended to enable councils to recover their costs for administering the system without placing a financial burden on ratepayers. The existence of a fee should act as a deterrent against frivolous or vexatious complaints. To avoid the imposition of financial hardship on the less well off, such as pensioners or those on a low income, a council may decide to refund, waive or reduce fees as appropriate. A council will not accept a complaint if it considers that the complainant has not provided evidence of having taken all reasonable steps to resolve the matter or if it considers that the complaint is frivolous or vexatious. Evidence of reasonable steps to resolve the issue may include the keeping of records of discussions or attempts at discussion between the parties, copies of letters sent to the hedge owner by the complainant and records of meetings attended by the parties. Where the council proceeds with the complaint, it must first decide whether the height of the hedge adversely affects the complainant's reasonable enjoyment of his property. If so, the council must then consider what action, if any, is required.

If the council decides that action should be taken, it will issue a remedial notice. Clause 4 states that a remedial notice will specify the height to which a hedge must be reduced. It may specify other actions such as crown lifting or thinning. The remedial notice will also specify the time frame within which the work must be

carried out. Before issuing any notice, councils will take into consideration other environmental factors, such as bird nesting and bat roosts. A remedial notice may not specify the removal of any hedge or a reduction in its height to less than two metres. That ensures that a balance is achieved between the right to enjoy property and the benefits and amenity value that a well-maintained hedge can provide. A remedial notice remains in force even if a property changes ownership, and it will be registered as a statutory charge on that property. That means that any new owners will bear the responsibility for compliance. The remedial notice may also include maintenance requirements to ensure that the problem does not recur.

Naturally, the hedge owner and the complainant have the right of appeal against the issue or non-issue of a remedial notice, or against the relaxation of its requirements. Clauses 6 and 7 set out details in relation to the appeals procedure. Appeals will be determined by the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal. That will involve consideration and review of the case files as well as site visits. Following an appeal, a remedial notice may be withdrawn or varied, or, in a case where a council has decided not to issue a remedial notice, the decision may be rescinded and a remedial notice issued on behalf of the council.

Clause 9 creates an offence of non-compliance with the terms of a remedial notice that carries a fine of up to £1,000. Continued failure to carry out the required remedial work may then result in further fines and, ultimately, daily fines. In cases of non-compliance with the terms of the remedial notice, councils will have a discretionary power to enter the land where the hedge is situated and carry out the work specified. The council will be able to recover the cost of the work from the owner of the hedge. Any unpaid expenses will be registered as a charge on the property.

Clause 11 protects the council against civil action where it has acted in a default situation and performed remedial works on a hedge that has subsequently died. That protection will only apply where a council has adopted a best practice approach and been non-negligent in its actions. For a hedge to die as a consequence of council action would be most unusual. A council official or appeal official making a site visit to inspect the hedge is required to give at least 24 hours' notice to the hedge owner. Councils

are also required to give the hedge owner seven days' notice of intention to enter land to perform remedial work.

The experience of England and Wales, where similar legislative provisions have been in place since 2005, indicates that this issue can be dealt with successfully. My Department will produce various guidance documents covering all the key issues to accompany the Bill's operation. They will be developed in liaison with local councils to ensure that they are relevant and fit for purpose and will include guidance for complainants and hedge owners, guidance for councils to facilitate the assessment of cases and guidance with respect to the appeals process.

The Bill will have a positive and practical impact on the lives of people suffering detriment due to neighbouring high hedges. It will focus attention on high hedge problems and should, as a consequence, result in improved relations between neighbours and enable more disputes to be resolved amicably, without recourse to the lodging of formal complaints. All public representatives know constituents who have been afflicted by the misery of having to put up with being next door to an unreasonably high hedge. It really is an affliction because nothing can be done about it currently. The High Hedges Bill seeks to remedy that situation, and I commend it to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mar Chathaoirleach an Choiste Comhshaoil, cuirim fáilte roimh an Bhille um Fálta Ard. As Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, I welcome the High Hedges Bill. It contains provisions that will provide a means of tackling high hedge problems that affect domestic properties. It introduces a way for people who feel that their domestic property is affected adversely by a high hedge to lodge a formal complaint with their local council after they have tried unsuccessfully to resolve the matter through neighbourly discussion.

At its meeting on 15 April 2010, the Committee was briefed by officials on the outcome of the departmental consultation on the Bill. Members were informed that the Bill focuses specifically and narrowly on dealing with high hedges that relate to problems between neighbours; it does not cover issues relating to single trees, roots, leaves and so forth. Nonetheless, I am sure that all Members will welcome the Bill as, no doubt,

we have all come across or heard of disputes between neighbours over what can be the very divisive issue of nuisance hedges.

One of the main concerns expressed to officials at the meeting was the issue of fees. Members were informed that the Department intends to give individual councils discretion in setting fees for complainants. The Committee expressed the view that that could lead to big differences between local authorities: one council could set a fee at £300, whereas another could set it at £30. Similarly, some types of resident, such as pensioners, could be required to pay fees in one council area, whereas those in another could be exempt. The Committee has asked for more information on charging regimes in other regions and will consider the implications of that flexible approach during Committee Stage. It is possible that the Committee will feel that more controls should be incorporated into the legislation to avoid large discrepancies arising between councils.

Further concerns were expressed about the ability of people from lower socio-economic groups to pay a fee for complaints and whether that would end up being prohibitive. There was also concern about paying the costs of specialists, such as tree surgeons, if required. Officials informed the Committee that the Minister is minded to include a cap on fees in the legislation, and the Committee was inclined to agree with that approach. However, the Committee also feels that guidance on the level of fees would be useful, and members welcomed the officials' commitment to provide guidance to complainants and councils.

Another concern around fees was the idea of the complainant paying up front to try to alleviate problems that they face from the high hedges of a third party. Officials informed members that the Bill will create a level playing field and that it is not trying to allocate blame. However, members felt that the idea of a complainant who has been vindicated but still has to pick up the tab for a fee is something that they want to look into further. The feeling was that, if the complainant's neighbour had been more neighbourly, there would have been no need to complain in the first place. Members were concerned that the perception will be that the complainant is being penalised because their neighbour was not prepared to take action. The Committee will, no doubt, revisit that matter at Committee Stage.

Another area of concern was the appeals body; the Valuation Tribunal. Members agreed that using a body that is already established is a good idea, as it removes the need to go through the costly and time-consuming process of identifying and appointing persons to handle appeals relating to high hedges. However, there was a concern that, with the appearance of solicitors and barristers, significant legal costs would start to ensue. Officials were of the view that there may be a flurry of appeals if and when this legislation becomes operational but, as time goes by, the number will diminish rapidly. Members remain concerned that, although the problem is not envisaged, those disputes can become very hostile and may end up in tribunals where legal aid costs may start to escalate rapidly. Although the Bill aims to encourage people to resolve high hedges disputes informally through discussion and compromise, we all know that, for some people, that is simply not an option. Again, we will explore that issue further when the Bill comes to the Committee.

12.15 pm

As soon as the House refers the Bill to the Committee, the Committee will call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals, and members will be extremely interested to hear their views. I look forward to an ongoing good working relationship with officials to ensure that the Committee is able to scrutinise the legislation properly. Thar ceann an Choiste Comhshaoil tugaim tacaíocht do phrionsabail an Bhille. On behalf of the Committee, I support the principles of the Bill.

Mr Bell: I commend Minister Poots for bringing forward legislation that has been sought by and will have a direct impact on those on the ground and will continue to make the House relevant to those people's needs and aspirations. The legislation is balanced and takes a solution-focused approach, and it is weighted appropriately towards encouraging people to look for sensible negotiations and compromise before taking legal routes. That is to be commended. In areas where there are difficulties, people should adopt the spirit of the legislation, which is, in effect, to seek a solution and to keep a record of that search for a solution, before resorting to legislation. Environmental concerns about bats and other species were identified, and they have been addressed appropriately.

As a councillor on Ards Borough Council, I declare an interest. Councils cannot be expected to constantly pick up the bill for every piece of legislation that comes along. The fee is appropriate. Equally, it should be measured. As in all other areas, people who find it difficult to pay should not be denied access to that form of redress and justice, so the situation for those on a low income and pensioners should be looked at.

The Bill is a win for ratepayers and, on balance, for common sense. Hedges, in themselves, provide an amenity, and, if they are well maintained, they can encourage good neighbourliness and create a win-win situation for everybody. On the other hand, some people feel that they have no responsibility to their neighbours. They feel that they have no stewardship over their own property and that they are not responsible for how it impacts on the amenities of others, so, rightly, the Bill addresses that problem.

The Chairperson spoke well on behalf of the Committee, and I endorse his comments and the nature of the legislation. Where there are difficulties, I appeal to people to genuinely seek a spirit of compromise and to look towards their responsibilities as neighbours and as good stewards. Prevention is better than cure. Ultimately, however, the Bill is a win for the House, because it deals with a real issue that has to be addressed. People asked us to do something about it; however, as the Chairperson said, up to now, nothing could be done. The House is redressing that situation and giving people the response that they asked for. I genuinely hope that very few cases will have to go down the legal route of paying fees.

Mr T Clarke: Does the Member agree that it is disappointing that the legislation had to be introduced at all? When a hedge reaches a certain height, common sense should prevail. Good neighbourliness, civil relationships and common sense could have removed the need for legislation.

Mr Bell: The Member for South Antrim made his point well, and that is the essence of the legislation. We do not want things to reach that point, and, in many ways, the legislation will act as a deterrent and a preventative measure. Equally, people will no longer be able to ignore their responsibility to respect their neighbours' quality of life and amenities. The House will

legislate to ensure that that ignorance comes to an end. I commend the Minister for bringing that legislation forward.

Mr Beggs: I also welcome the progress of a Bill to deal with the problem of high hedges. To the extent that the Bill recommends that local councils be given a role in dealing with high hedges, I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council.

In common with many Members, I have been contacted by constituents whose enjoyment of their home and property has been blighted by inconsiderate neighbours who have allowed their high hedges to cut off daylight. I had been pursuing a private Member's Bill, particularly after the previous Minister of the Environment said that he would not pursue such legislation during the lifetime of the current Assembly. I welcome Minister Poots's U-turn on his predecessor's approach.

I praise the Assembly's Research Services for providing me with background information as I pursued the private Member's legislation. In legislating, one of the most significant decisions to be taken is on the nature of statutory involvement. The options that were presented to me included a formal, statutory and expensive bureaucratic role, such as that employed by the Planning Service. I, in common with the Minister and the Department, concluded that that would not be appropriate. The Bill outlines the most appropriate mechanism, which is that neighbours should be required to attempt to resolve their differences over their hedges before statutory bodies, such as local councils, become directly involved. I hope that the introduction of that requirement will resolve many disputes at an early stage and improve relationships between neighbours, whereas the involvement of the councils has the potential to make those relationships worse. I hope that the Bill will create pressure for local resolutions between neighbours without outside involvement. As other Members said, that is largely the route that has been followed in England and Wales, where it appears to have been relatively successful.

I will pursue the issue in Committee, but it would be helpful for the Minister to elaborate on the definition of a high hedge that has "two or more evergreens". In the Bill, an evergreen is defined as:

"an evergreen tree or shrub or a semi-evergreen tree or shrub."

What hedges will be excluded by that definition? Why will such hedges be excluded? Dense hedging can arise from a variety of other sources. For six months of the year, heavy leafage from other types of trees and hedges could cause as many difficulties for homeowners. To determine whether the definition of a high hedge needs to be widened, I would like the Minister to provide further information.

I agree with the procedures that have been outlined. In the first instance, neighbours should attempt to resolve the problem. In the absence of reasonableness at that stage, the relevant council will become involved. However, to minimise the involvement of statutory agencies and the associated costs, it would be useful to require neighbours to take the first step.

As we experience the impact of the new legislation, it will be important to have a mechanism for dealing with people who make spurious complaints and involve the councils unnecessarily. Should a neighbour who is unreasonable in not resolving an issue incur some of the costs of the fee? It would be unfair for homeowners who have been adversely affected to bear the entire cost, despite having done everything possible to resolve the problem. It would be unfair for an unreasonable neighbour who has blighted their enjoyment of their home to expect them to pay additional fees. An agreement on how to strike that balance could further incentivise neighbours to reach a local resolution. The expectation that people who are unreasonable will face additional fees should increase the likelihood of an early local resolution.

I agree that the involvement of local government in finalising appropriate guidance would be useful, because a consistent approach on the part of neighbouring councils would be helpful. We do not want to see vastly different approaches being taken and the public becoming confused, should they move from one council area to another and face a similar problem. It would be helpful to everyone if local government were involved in developing consistent guidance notes which, ultimately, officers and councils would follow.

The serving of a remedial notice is a useful mechanism. It allows defaulting owners to decide whom they will employ or to do the

work themselves and to rectify the situation at minimum cost. I agree that we must have further legislative powers to ensure that the work is carried out, should one have an unreasonable neighbour. I agree that any individual who is so stubborn as to ignore the decision of officers and councillors should be subject to a fine. Ultimately, there should be a charge on the property so that there is no doubt or dispute over whether the issue can be dealt with. That sort of power should encourage more reasonableness between those who are involved in the process.

I agree that there has to be an appeals mechanism to ensure a degree of independence in cases where people are dissatisfied with decisions that have been made. However, we do not want to create another quango. The Valuation Tribunal comprises individuals who have legal experience and experience of valuation and properties. With that comes knowledge of properties and boundaries etc. Again, there is a lay person who is not involved on either side, and that appears to me to be a reasonable balance.

Clause 8 provides the power to gain access to the relevant property. That power has to be available in instances in which an assessment has to be carried out but the neighbour will not provide reasonable access to appropriately assess the situation. However, it is important that anyone who is going to enter someone else's property gives notice of his or her intention, and I see 24 hours being mentioned. Indeed, there should be ID involved, so that there is no dispute that this person has the appropriate statutory authority. The boundary or perimeter must also be left as secure as it was in the first place.

Clause 10 requires the owner to carry out the work and the occupier, who may be the person who is causing the difficulty, to work and to enable it to happen. That gives the power to the owner of the property to ensure that the work will be carried out, even if he or she has an unco-operative tenant. That is appropriate.

Clause 12 talks about corporate bodies. The neighbour may well be a company limited by guarantee; it may be a corporate body, rather than an individual. That is appropriate.

Clause 16 enables the Department to modify the criteria in the light of experience gained. We should not require extensive new legislation, if

it needs to be altered in the light of experience and it is appropriate that change can occur through that mechanism. However, there are some sensitive issues, particularly as we could be affecting people's homes. It is important that we tread lightly, particularly when changing the legislation, to ensure that it is appropriate. It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify why such language is used in clause 18. Why will changes be largely by negative legislation, rather than by affirmative legislation? Such sensitive changes affecting a home and one's personal property should occur in a manner that the Assembly is comfortable with.

In general, I support the legislation as presented. However, it may be possible to slightly amend and refine it in the light of experience at Committee Stage.

12.30 pm

Mr Dallat: I am thankful that, on this occasion, I do not have to declare membership of Coleraine Borough Council, and I am sure that the day will come when no Member of this august body will have to do that.

The debate is welcome. Many people are relieved that the Bill has progressed to this stage, and I thank the Minister for that. Nevertheless, there is still some astonishment that we are reaching only this stage eight years after the same legislation was introduced in Britain.

I should not focus entirely on the much-picked-on *leylandii*, which appears to be the greatest offender, because there are others. Nevertheless, it is an opportunity in planning terms to advise people who are considering planting hedges to choose varieties that are indigenous to this country and, as far as possible, not to try other species. I am sure that people discovered, to their misfortune, that hedges all over the country were killed off during the recent bad weather because they could not stand the cold. I cannot blame the Planning Service for those crimes, because it does not choose tree species.

The Bill is important because it concerns people who have been robbed of the right to natural daylight. The Minister said that he does not want to impose his will on local councils, which is understandable and fair enough. Nevertheless, there is a risk that, without robust control from the Department of the Environment, local councils may vary widely in the way in which

they deal with the problem. I have been a local councillor for 33 years, and I know that it is in no one's interests to pick rows or to become an adjudicator between neighbours. Therefore, ministerial guidance is a necessary part of the Bill.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that the Bill's appeal mechanism should ensure that, should there be partiality at council level, there is independence? That appeal mechanism is appropriate to deal with the issue.

Mr Dallat: The Member mentioned the appeal mechanism in his contribution. It is important, and it may, to some degree, let local councillors off the hook in deciding what should happen. However, local councils do not have a good record on environmental issues. We have only to think of how councils deal with litter and impose fines on people who are guilty of litter offences. We debated the issue in the House last week, and it would be interesting if the Minister were to enquire about how different councils enforce that legislation, which, in some ways, is similar to the topic of this debate.

The legislation is welcome, and I hope that the Minister's promise to have it in place before the end of this Assembly's lifetime is delivered. I do not question that he will do that. I fully understand the limited time that is available, and we are grateful that the legislation will go through and will not be cast aside.

Given that local councils will be charged with the responsibility of administering the legislation, it would be useful for the Minister to indicate whether he is talking about the current 26 councils or the elusive 11. My prediction is that it will be the 26 councils. I apologise for veering slightly off the subject, but I simply ask the Minister to ensure that the existing councils do not simply pay lip service and that they are given every support in delivering the Bill.

In conclusion, despite my reservations, I welcome the Bill. However, I worry that many people who are now elderly and living on meagre pensions planted *leylandii* in the past, as I and others did, and they now may face horrendous bills to have them pruned or removed because they have grown much higher than was intended. The bill for such work can be horrendous, and anyone who has employed a tree surgeon knows that they do not come cheap.

The Bill relates to domestic property and the cutting off of natural light. Members will know that retired people spend a great deal of time in their gardens either appreciating the plants that they have grown or simply enjoying the fresh air. I know many people who no longer have that privilege because the hedges around their gardens have practically engulfed the daylight. I am not sure that the proposed legislation will deal with that.

The main point is to ensure that a consistent approach is taken, that genuine cases are identified and dealt with and that local councils do not become bogged down in frivolous complaints that are more about disputes among neighbours that might go back three or four generations. The Bill should be about high hedges and nothing more.

Common sense has been mentioned. However, Members know that common sense does not always prevail. That is why there is legislation for most aspects of life. It may be that in medieval times, people could actually sit down, discuss their issues and come to a decision. Today, I am afraid, that is long since gone.

Therefore, I support the Second Stage of the High Hedges Bill. I apologise to people who have planted leylandii trees, trimmed them and kept them in good order.

Ms Lo: The Alliance Party supports the High Hedges Bill. A number of our public representatives have been approached by residents who have problems with neighbouring hedges and who have, at times, been unable to achieve resolution to disputes due to the lack of legislation in Northern Ireland governing the height and maintenance of hedges.

However, the Alliance Party is concerned that the proposed legislation focuses only on problems that are associated with hedges and does not intend to address problems that relate to roots of trees and single trees. A single tree can act as a barrier to a property's light. Roots can seriously affect the garden of an adjacent property or an adjoining driveway. The proposed legislation should provide a means to address such problems.

Of course, given that councils will administer complaints, the role that the proposed legislation will give them is highly important. DOE must provide district councils with the necessary guidance to deal with complaints,

particularly in how a complainant can provide evidence of having attempted to solve a problem prior to making a complaint. In many cases, communication or mediation may not have been documented, which means that it may be difficult for a complainant to provide evidence of it. My party would like more clarification on how DOE intends to deal with complaints that relate to land or domestic property that is vacant or for which there is no identifiable occupier.

Under the English system, someone who wants a high hedge to be investigated must pay a fee of around £500 or more. There has been some indication that that fee has meant that people have been deterred from complaining. DOE needs to provide guidance to councils so that a consistent fee can be operated across the board. It also needs to consider reduced fees for elderly people and those who receive means-tested benefits.

Some people who are responsible for problems that are caused by high hedges may find it financially difficult to employ a tree surgeon if a notice is served on them. Financial assistance should be considered, because it may be necessary for people who cannot afford the required work to carry it out at short notice. The Department must provide information and educate the public on the new legislation, and resources may be required to advise individuals on how to maintain hedges and to avoid problems in the first place.

Dealing with neighbourly disputes can have a detrimental effect on the health of those involved because of stress and pressure. The Department must indicate as early as possible the time frame for dealing with each complaint so that problems are not dragged out and people are not faced with unnecessary delays, which cause more stress and anxiety.

The Alliance Party supports the High Hedges Bill, which will assist householders when mediation fails. It looks forward to some means of dealing with the problem to formally resolve disputes between neighbours.

Mr Ross: I also welcome the High Hedges Bill. It has been much talked about since the return of devolution, and I am glad that it is now before the House. We have heard much today of neighbourliness and common sense, and today is one of the rare occasions on which I have agreed with John Dallat.

Unfortunately, many of us who have dealt with these cases recognise that there is often a lack of common sense and neighbourliness among those who are making their neighbours' lives a misery. All Members will have had people coming to them because their neighbour's hedges are blocking their light or hanging over their property, and often, despite their best efforts to reach an accommodation with their neighbour, they find that they do not get very far and need assistance to resolve the issue. In many cases, Members will also have found that councils are powerless to provide that assistance. They can go down the route of tackling the matter on environmental health grounds, but there is no legislation to help councils to take the actions required. At least this Bill will give councils those powers.

At Second Stage, we are obviously addressing the broad principles of the Bill, and I do not believe that any Member will have difficulties with those. However, there are a few issues, some of which have already been discussed today, such as which hedges are to be covered by the legislation, which the Committee looks forward to examining during Committee Stage.

Another matter that I raised when statements on high hedges were made previously in the House is that of mediation. I am aware of instances in my constituency in which elderly people felt uncomfortable about approaching neighbours about a nuisance hedge because of previous arguments. The Bill provides that individuals must initially try to find a resolution on their own. However, it is important that councils are given direction from the Department on how to help individuals who are nervous about approaching their neighbours. I recognise that the legislation envisages councils being impartial and independent third parties in the complaints procedure and that it is difficult for councils or councillors to provide guidance. However, in many constituencies, mediation groups and services are available, and perhaps councils could work with those groups and direct complainants to them.

Another issue that has been discussed today is fees, and there is broad agreement that that issue must be further examined. Flexibility will be given to councils, but it is important that guidance is given on the upper limit to fees that can be applied. Councils will also be given discretion to provide refunds or discounts to certain vulnerable groups, and although fees

are necessary to stop trivial complaints, it is important that they are not set at such a level as to disincentivise pensioners and low-income families from making complaints about nuisance hedges. Indeed, it has been said before that individuals who do not act in a good neighbourly fashion and who do not take action on a hedge that causes grief to their neighbours can simply sit back and do nothing, knowing that the individual who has been impacted upon or the council and, by extension, the ratepayer, will have to pick up the fee. That is not particularly good, and we will wish to look at that as a Committee.

12.45 pm

A final issue is whether a mechanism should be included for a group complaint in the case of a large piece of property that perhaps backs on to three or four residences. A collective complaint may include those three or four households or they each may have to make an individual complaint, which might involve individual fees. The Committee may consider that issue, and the Minister's guidance on that will be useful.

I support the Bill, and I look forward to examining it in closer detail in Committee.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the Bill, which, as other Members said, is greatly needed. High hedges may seem a minor issue to people who are not directly affected by them, but they can have a detrimental effect on people's quality of life. High hedges spoil views, block out sunlight, and so on. That can often lead to direct conflict between neighbours and to stressful situations. A process is needed to arrest such situations before they escalate. It is only right that attempts to resolve the situation take place between the relevant parties initially and, hopefully, the legislation will be preventative and the processes will not need to be enacted.

Other Members said that the issue of fees must be considered further. An assurance should be given that fees will not differ greatly among councils and that there will be a degree of parity among councils. That needs to be considered in much greater detail at Committee.

I also agree with the Chairperson and other Members that the Valuation Tribunal should be used, because that mechanism has already been established so it will save costs. There is little doubt that the disputes that we have discussed can become difficult, with opposing

parties becoming increasingly polarised as disputes continue in a number of cases. Therefore, it is important that the Bill is as fair as possible to the complainant and the hedge owner and that the process that is put in place is robust. I agree with the Minister that we need to consider experiences elsewhere to ensure that the legislation is fit for purpose and does not adversely impact on those on lower incomes, as the Committee Chairperson and other Members also highlighted.

I will not go into any greater detail, because other Members have covered the issue well. The Committee looks forward to scrutinising the Bill in much greater detail. I emphasise the need for people on lower incomes and those who could be adversely impacted to have some degree of protection.

Mr Weir: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. As has been indicated, the legislation will be administered largely by councils. I see at least one Member who has freed himself from councils looking a bit demob happy. He is tut-tutting that I have such links. When John Dallat referred to his preference that indigenous breeds be planted, I wondered whether, by some bizarre dream, David Vance had managed to wander into the Chamber.

I also declare an interest as vice-president of the Local Government Association, and I welcome what everyone will accept as root-and-branch reform of the legislation. It has received universal welcome. I was half expecting some Members from the opposite Benches to complain about Special Branch, but the legislation is something that even they can agree with. I appreciate that many of the points have been covered, so I do not intend to reiterate those. The Bill has received a universal welcome from parties in the Chamber, councils and individual citizens.

As another Member said, the legislation is unusual in that, in an ideal world, we hope that it is never used. Vast numbers of people have good relationships with their neighbours and act responsibly when it comes to their hedges. Therefore, it is a pity that such legislation is necessary. If everyone were to act responsibly, there would be no need for the Bill.

An appropriate balance has been struck on fees, and we will be looking at the detail at a later stage. However, we are all aware of

occasions when a dispute between neighbours in our constituency loses some perspective. In such situations, unless applicants are required to pay a fee, the danger is that there could be a rash of utterly vexatious applications. Therefore, there must be some deterrent to prevent people from causing their neighbours problems. Irrespective of whether we come from an urban, rural or suburban constituency, we are aware of many genuine cases in which, unfortunately, one neighbour has acted irresponsibly. I am aware of cases in which pensioners have felt intimidated or have been given short shrift by their neighbour when they try to press the issue. Those people need to be protected.

There have been teething problems with the implementation of similar legislation in England and Wales. Therefore, we must ensure that our legislation is right, and given the time that has been spent on it so far, I hope that the broad thrust of it is right. Some details will need to be teased out at Committee Stage. For example, have we got the balance right between ensuring that there is uniformity across Northern Ireland and allowing councils a degree of individual action? A cap has been put on fees, and, in Committee, we will be looking to see whether that cap goes far enough or whether a tighter regime, with a set fee across Northern Ireland, is needed.

The Committee will also need to look at the opportunity for councils either to vary or waive a fee. Members who follow what tends to happen in the courts will know that there is a broad rule of thumb that, when someone complains or takes an action against someone else, the winning side does not have to pay the costs. Another area that needs to be examined is instances in which neighbours have a genuine complaint. If, after investigation, the decision is found in their favour, there may be an argument to be made as to whether the party who transgressed should pick up the entire bill in order that the applicant might recoup the fee. We may need to look at whether variation should apply in such situations.

Going by the response of my council and others, the Committee will need to look at the detail to ensure that councils feel that they are properly indemnified, as the matter should be cost-neutral to them. However, the broad thrust of the legislation is welcome.

As Mr Dallat said, the legislation will not make headlines in the 'News Letter', 'The Irish News' or the 'Belfast Telegraph', but to many people, this is an important issue that affects quality of life. If their light is being blocked out, or if their enjoyment of their garden, their conservatory or their back room is consistently being spoiled by an enormous hedge, that becomes their number one issue. If the Assembly can adopt a common-sense approach to provide that quality of life, the High Hedges Bill will be worthwhile, and something of which we can be proud.

As a member of the Committee for the Environment, I look forward to scrutinising the Bill to ensure that we get the detail and the implementation right. I strongly support the legislation.

Mr Kinahan: I am extremely pleased to be able to speak on such an important Bill. It may seem minor to some, but it is very important to all those who want to enjoy their houses without experiencing any problems. I also declare an interest as a councillor in south Antrim.

It is worth mentioning that it is sad that we have to bring such rules and regulations into issues on which people cannot agree. I welcome the touchy-feely side to the Bill, which makes every effort to make sure that things are sorted out without confrontation. In many aspects of life, we need less regulation, and too often we set up rules, regulations and systems that actually cause confrontation. For example, in the planning world, a developer tries to put as many houses as he can on a site, and the first time that the people living next to the site know about it is when they have their chance to object. Therefore, confrontation starts right at the beginning of the process. In too many aspects of life, we have confrontation because we have rules.

Today we have something that is very clever, and I congratulate the Minister, the Department, and, indeed, my colleagues who started the idea off in the previous Assembly. We are going for something that has a soft method of dealing with the matters in question, because it starts with the intention of getting those who are involved to sort the issues out themselves and then passes them on to councils so that they can be independent and impartial mediators. If that fails, there are always the MLAs and whoever else can help — we do not want to leave ourselves out of the equation.

It is essential that the Bill provides for an appeals process and that any decision that is made will be binding. I welcome many more aspects of the Bill, and many Members touched on those. I will deal with one or two little matters that others did not raise. For example, the Bill refers to an area of 0.2 hectares. That is actually a huge area, and if there are enough trees in that area, when do they become hedges? We need more clarification on that. In my constituency of South Antrim, there are one or two ongoing disputes where trees have become thick hedges that are stopping the light and making it impossible for the neighbour involved to live there. We need more clarification on that issue.

Last week, when discussing a different matter, I mentioned my concern that councils do not know who owns every bit of land. A dispute could go on and on, because people cannot identify who owns a piece of land. Councils need to find a way of ascertaining who owns or is responsible for land, otherwise we will not be able to resolve the issue.

When cutting hedges, we also need to take care that we remember the nesting season, the bird life and the insects, and so forth, that are in those hedges. We cannot just cut them down at any time of year. Also, when I was canvassing last week, I saw weeds in hedges. It is all very well having hedges, but I know of somebody who had two or three hedges next to them that were so full of weeds, they were generating a smell and gathering rubbish. We should keep that in mind when we look at the Bill in Committee.

I was amused to read towards the end of the Bill the reference to the right to transmit documents electronically. Much as I love electronic mail, we must remember that there is a mass of people out there who do not use it. Therefore, we must use the normal methods of communication at the same time, rather than relying entirely on e-mail and computers.

I congratulate everyone who has been involved in formulating the Bill. It is a very clever mechanism to get things resolved, and I look forward to seeing it come before the Committee and to all of us working together.

Mr Shannon: I support the Second Stage of the high trees and hedges legislation. If there was one issue that was important on the doorsteps, it was this legislation. I say that in all honesty, because in the past five weeks, I have been

tramping the roads of Strangford and wearing the leather off my shoes at least once — I am on to my second pair. There is great interest in the issue, so I am pleased that Second Stage is before the Assembly today.

People were encouraged when I mentioned to them that the Assembly was working on the issue. When the debate is over, I intend to get extra copies of the Hansard report and to make them available for the people who contact me. A brave few will get their copy of the Hansard report through the post in the next day or two, and that will show that the Assembly is making legislative changes on the things that matter.

1.00 pm

One of people's greatest concerns as the summer approaches is the growth of trees. Trees that were once 4 ft or 5 ft are now perhaps 30 ft and are still growing. That is an indication of what people are concerned about. Over the past few weeks, I visited houses that were all different heights. Some were surrounded by trees that were higher than the houses, and the impact of those trees was, therefore, greater than in other places. High hedges and trees shut out light and prevent people from being able to see the sun rising and getting value from that. That indicates how important the issue is. People are also concerned about high trees in strong winds. When trees sway in particularly strong winds, people think to themselves, "My goodness, what happens if that tree falls on top of my house?". Over the years, many people have requested that legislation in Northern Ireland follow the relevant legislation in the UK mainland, and we are coming close to that. I pay tribute to the Minister of the Environment, Edwin Poots, for working so hard to bring forward the legislation. He is a man of the people, because he knows what the issues are, and the issue of high hedges is a critical one for many people.

I wish to give an example of how high hedges affect people. I think that my colleague Peter Weir touched on this point earlier. A young woman, who has a young son, has been crippled with a rare back condition, and I finally managed to get the Health Department and the Social Development Department to see sense and build an extension to enable her to move the bed from her living room into a fit-for-purpose living room. However, the woman found the room depressing because of the height of the trees,

which were only a matter of feet away. She told me that the light in the room always has to be switched on, even during daylight, and that she does not like lying in the room because it makes her feel down and depressed. That is a critical issue for someone who is profoundly disabled. I cannot wait for the legislation to be passed and for the 40 ft trees around her bungalow to be trimmed to an acceptable height. I am pleased and thankful that the legislation applies to evergreen and semi-evergreen hedges and trees. That is good news for that woman.

It seems that high hedges and trees have the capacity to bring out the worst in some neighbours. I am sure that other elected representatives will have seen that at times. It is my desire that the legislation will help to address that matter. The legislation is not a stick with which to beat the owners of the trees but will work both ways. One of my constituents has 8 ft trees, and her neighbour wants her to cut them to 5 ft. The neighbourhood has detached houses with large gardens, and 8 ft trees are certainly not out of character in the area. The legislation will allow for proper mediation between neighbours and will, I hope, help to end that dispute. It is not all about wielding the big stick, which is probably the wrong terminology to use in that regard.

The Minister and his Department have ensured that complaints will now be acted on. If a complaint is lodged, the goal is for the hedges and trees concerned to be cut to an acceptable limit and within a reasonable period of time, and those who fail to follow the directives to cut their trees will face fines for non-compliance. It is hoped that the legislation will help to solve neighbourhood disputes and ensure that a common sense approach is followed. There will soon be a format and mechanism for sorting out problems and coming to a sensible, satisfactory conclusion. The operation of similar legislation on the mainland is already showing the benefits of that approach.

Members and the public in Strangford know better than most that I am always ready and willing to help with constituency issues, whatever they may be. No issue is too small for me. I look forward to the day when, instead of saying to constituents that nothing can be done, I can point them in the right direction and get them the help and assistance that they need to reach a satisfactory conclusion for everyone. I

congratulate the Minister and his Department on the hard work that they have done in making the legislation a reality. It is long overdue, and shaded neighbours throughout the Province thank the Minister and his Department for that.

The Minister of the Environment: I am grateful for Members' valuable and informative contributions to the debate, and I now wish to respond to a few of them.

Roy Beggs spoke about semi-evergreens, which is a standard horticultural term. He wanted to know whether evergreens can lose their leaves in certain climates and regions. He also asked why the owner of a hedge does not have to pay. A balance must be struck. The complainant is asking for the high hedge problem to be addressed and, therefore, it is right that he or she should pay a fee. Hedge owners will have to meet the cost of trimming hedges, and those who are financially disadvantaged can obtain help from council services to do so. However, I am open to the suggestion that, where hedge owners have been particularly negligent and obstructive in dealing with the issue, councils may be able to impose some of the cost burden on them.

Mr Dallat asked whether we are going to restrict the sale of leylandii. However, the problem is not evergreen trees; the problem is where they are planted and how they are maintained. The issue is similar to the one concerning dangerous dogs: are there bad dogs or just bad owners? Very often, it is people's ownership and maintenance of hedges that is the problem, not the hedges themselves. Mr Dallat took the approach that these foreigners are to blame for everything. However, I caution that we cannot blame foreign species of trees for everything, because the Castlewellan Gold originated in County Down. Perhaps the Chairman of the Environment Committee, Mr Boylan, can identify to Mr Dallat exactly where Castlewellan is.

Mr Dallat: I assure the Minister that it was not my intention to introduce xenophobia into a debate on trees. However, I remind him that his Department advises people to choose natural species.

The Minister of the Environment: I am sure Mr Dallat recognises that, on this occasion, I am being slightly facetious. It is good to have a sense of humour now and again.

Anna Lo mentioned Land and Property Services. In certain circumstances, vacant land can revert

to the Crown. She also asked why deciduous trees are not included in the legislation. The scoping consultation conducted by my Department showed that the main problem is the dense, thick foliage of high hedges that are near domestic property. The Bill has been specifically drafted to tackle that considerable problem, which causes so many neighbourhood disputes. She also asked why tree roots were not included. However, that matter can be dealt with through civil actions in the courts, particularly where roots are affecting sewerage pipes, wall foundations or pathways on other people's properties. In those circumstances, neighbours can reasonably deal with the issue through the existing system. However, this legislation is being introduced because there is a gap in the system and no means of dealing with this particular issue.

Alastair Ross asked whether the Department would provide mediation services where someone is reticent in asking their neighbours about a hedge. In such cases, the aggrieved person may ask for help from mediation services. Organisations provide those services in Northern Ireland, and, in that instance, councils will be able to facilitate individuals and point them in the right direction.

Cathal Boylan asked how we will ensure that the fees do not vary too widely between council areas. Although we are giving councils the power to set their own fees, the level will be based on the cost of dealing with the complainant. We anticipate that the levels will be relatively consistent, and I am sure that local government organisations will apply their minds to that issue.

Alastair Ross asked whether group complaints could be made. Each house may be differently impacted by hedges, resulting, therefore, in several single complaints. However, a council can decide to reduce the fees if there are a number of complaints about one set of trees.

Peter Weir asked what lessons we could learn from experiences in England and Wales, where similar legislation has been in operation for around five years. After the legislation was introduced, there was an initial surge of complaints, which then tailed off. Therefore, it appears that, with the legislation in place, people are more prepared to compromise and co-operate, because they do not want the council to impose something on them at a later point.

Danny Kinahan asked why areas of 0.2 hectares are excluded. That is the identifiable scale used in the Forestry Bill.

Electronic communication is included in the Bill as an option; it is not included to exclude members of the public. People can use that system, but we will still rely on snail mail where required.

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

Once again, I thank Members for their contributions. I look forward to seeing the Committee's work on the Bill, and, as is usual with legislation, I am sure that we will have a useful and fruitful exchange with Committee members.

When I was thinking about the Bill's Second Stage, I was reminded of a poem by Robert Frost, 'Mending Wall', which I was taught at school. In the poem, two neighbours go out each year to replace the wall between their properties. One of the neighbours is less inclined to replace the wall and does not see why the wall is necessary, particularly as there is an orchard on one side of it. He says:

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall".

His neighbour replies, "Good fences make good neighbors". In this instance, one could say, "Something there is that doesn't love a high hedge". The response to that should be that good hedges, as opposed to high hedges, make good neighbours.

My officials and I will work closely with the Environment Committee, and we look forward to moving the legislation forward in the Assembly. The Bill will be hugely beneficial to many thousands of people across Northern Ireland, because it will deal with a problem that has been with them for many years. While out canvassing over the past number of weeks, I was regularly asked when the hedges legislation was coming in. I was able to indicate that we had started the process. The legislation will be hugely beneficial to the public and is an example of the sort of thing that the Assembly should be doing for the benefit of the wider public.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the High Hedges Bill [NIA 15/09] be agreed.

Executive Committee Business

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Finance and Personnel is not in his place to move the motion.

Committee Business

Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 5 November 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 10/09].

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tugaim tacaíocht don rún le fad a chur leis an Bhille um dramhaíl agus talamh éillithe. I support the motion to extend the Bill's Committee Stage. Waste is an issue of concern for us all, and Members will be aware that the Bill is a vital part of the legislative package that will help us to meet European targets for landfill and will enable councils to meet the Department's commitments under the waste management strategy. It is, therefore, essential that the Environment Committee takes its time to scrutinise the Bill fully and make sure that the legislation delivers those objectives effectively. With three Bills already in Committee and the High Hedges Bill progressing to Committee Stage this morning, the Environment Committee asks the House to support the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 5 November 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 10/09].

1.15 pm

Local Government (Finance) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 17 December 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Local Government (Finance) Bill [NIA Bill 14/09].

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tugaim tacaíocht don rún le fad a chur leis an Bhille airgeadais rialtais áitiúil. I support the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Local Government (Finance) Bill. As I just made the House aware, the Committee for the Environment is in the process of scrutinising several Bills and is determined to do that effectively with each and every one.

The Local Government (Finance) Bill aims to put in place mechanisms to modernise the legislative framework for local government finance and councillors' remuneration. It would seem from the Second Stage debate of the Bill that the greater freedom that it will give to councils to monitor their own financial affairs is largely welcome. However, that does not remove the need for the Committee to go through the detail of the Bill and take on board the views of all interested parties. To do that effectively, the Committee needs sufficient time, and it calls on the House to support its motion to extend the Committee Stage accordingly. Molaim an rún.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 17 December 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Local Government (Finance) Bill [NIA Bill 14/09].

Mr Deputy Speaker: As business seems to be moving faster than expected, I ask the House to take its ease for a few moments until we get reorganised.

Eggs and Chicks Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010: Prayer of Annulment

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That the Eggs and Chicks Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 (S.R. 2010/125) be annulled. —
[The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Paisley Jnr).]

Motion not moved.

Private Members' Business

Credit Unions

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

Mr Durkan: I beg to move

That this Assembly reaffirms its resolution of 17 February 2009 on the report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, unanimously supporting the expansion of credit union services including through their future regulation by the Financial Services Authority; notes the Treasury paper of 8 July 2009 which accepted the Assembly's key recommendations on credit union regulation and service enhancement; regrets that the opportunity to deliver necessary change in primary legislation through amendment to the Financial Services Bill in Westminster was lost; welcomes the current consultation by the Treasury and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on "Proposals for regulatory reform of credit unions in Northern Ireland"; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to pursue appropriate legislative change with the incoming Chancellor as a matter of priority.

As the motion indicates, the Assembly has already adopted unanimously the position that credit unions should be allowed to expand the range of services that they offer to their many members in Northern Ireland. The Assembly has recognised that the pathway to that is by way of regulation by the Financial Services Authority kicking in.

The report that the Assembly adopted unanimously in February 2009 provided for credit unions to continue to be registered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. However, in order to offer a wider range of services, they would have to be regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Only such regulation would allow credit unions to offer those additional services. Financial Services Authority regulation would have the additional benefit of covering credit union savings with the same guarantees as apply to banks and building societies. There are a number of benefits available to the members of credit unions and to the credit unions themselves as they seek to provide a

bigger and better business for their members in so many communities throughout this region.

Some issues arose in relation to expanding those services. Some people were confused by the differences between industrial and provident societies, such as the Presbyterian Mutual Society, and credit unions. However, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's report clearly focused on the position and the needs of credit unions and the potential to improve their offerings to their members.

The Treasury, in a document of July 2009, recognised the position that had been outlined by the Assembly in the Committee's report and the various statements and undertakings of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who, I am glad to see, is here for the debate. On that basis, when the Financial Services Bill was introduced at Westminster, those of us who sit in that House sought to table an amendment that would make provision for credit unions here to come under FSA regulation. It was a straightforward amendment. However, the Treasury Ministers took a fairly complicated view of the matter and said that all sorts of long-running consultation would be needed before such a change could take place. We contested that view at the time. Although I tabled the amendment, it was supported by DUP MPs and the then UUP MP as well as by my SDLP colleagues and others. There was no party dispute about the merits of using that Bill as a means of securing the necessary change in primary legislation. Even when we get the change in primary legislation, other measures will be needed by way of secondary legislation. There will also be issues about memorandums of understanding that would be needed, for example, between DETI and the FSA about how some of the proposals would work in practice and the precise interface between registration and regulation.

Although the Treasury took a complicated view at that stage and tried to blame DETI, we now have, as a result of the efforts between the Treasury and DETI, a published consultation document on proposals for the regulatory reform of credit unions in Northern Ireland. That document handily reflects the key recommendations that were endorsed by the Assembly and points out some implementation and management issues. The publication of that document should be regarded as a positive step, and I pay tribute to

the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her help. Many of us were concerned by the line that the Treasury appeared to take during the passage of the Financial Services Bill, and the Minister, through further representations to the Treasury, subsequently clarified that she and her Department had no objection to that Bill being used to implement the amendment.

Nevertheless, before Parliament was dissolved, although the Government were ready to table an amendment in the House of Lords that recycled our amendment from the House of Commons, which was carried, the Tory Party refused to dispose of the matter as part of the wash-up. That may give us cause for concern because, although it is positive that DETI and the Treasury produced the consultation document and the noises from the Treasury are that it would be committed early in a new Parliament to providing a legislative vehicle to remedy the anomaly that we identified, questions arise because of the Tory Party's attitude to the FSA.

The credit union movement here has worked and waited for a long time to reach the threshold of this change, so it would be a tragedy if, simply because of the Conservative Party's ideological position of wanting to do away with the FSA, with everything going back to Bank of England regulation, we ended up creating new confusion and delays. I am not sure that credit unions here would be comfortable being regulated by the Bank of England, and I am not sure that the Bank of England wants to regulate credit unions here or anywhere else.

There could be a hole in the Conservative Party's policy on the future regulation of the diversity of financial services. Whoever regulates banks and whatever argument might be made for the Bank of England regulating banks, many people are not convinced that that would be an adequate answer for credit unions. Credit unions are regulated in their own right by the FSA; that is what currently happens to credit unions across the water and what will happen in the future.

The motion is an attempt to give the Assembly an opportunity to reflect positively on the fact that our Minister and the Treasury have now moved along the lines that the Assembly endorsed in its backing of the report by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It is a matter of recognising that that has also been welcomed by the credit unions, which worked for a long time to bring about those

changes. The motion is also about recognising that, just as there were delays and twists in the past, there are dangers ahead. That is why the motion calls for the Minister to work with the Chancellor in whatever is the incoming Government at Westminster to progress the matter. It will not be entirely straightforward, and, although some of us at Westminster will play our part to try to advance matters, we recognise the key locus for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and, no doubt, for the Committee.

The motion was tabled to register the importance of the consultation document, to show continuing support for this urgently needed change, to recognise that there may be some difficulties and to offer our support and encouragement to the Minister as she faces the difficulties or twists that might emerge in her ongoing discussions with the Treasury.

1.30 pm

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the proposers of the motion, for which Mark Durkan has set out the case. We are still waiting for the Westminster authorities to bring forward the necessary changes. I sensed that they were looking for the longest distance between the two points, because the case was unanswerable, and it appears that the delays were unnecessary. The protracted consultation period simply confirmed the resistance to the idea rather than any well-founded or legitimate reasons for caution. Indeed, we could question why other regions were to be consulted on legislation that is specific to the Assembly's adopted position.

However, throughout the process, we have managed to maintain momentum and a significant degree of cross-party unanimity. That demonstrates the strength of the proposition. The motion exhorts the Minister to engage with the incoming Administration, and I am confident that she will do exactly that. The Minister has driven the process forward on behalf of the Assembly. Mark Durkan correctly pointed out that the credit union movement here is solidly behind the proposition that is outlined in the motion. It looks forward to the opportunity to expand its range of services and to provide a competitive alternative to existing service providers. That would be extremely welcome, particularly given the economic constraints that affect all facets of life in this region.

I reiterate my party's support for the legislation. I thank the proposers of the motion and acknowledge the work that the Minister has done on our behalf.

Mr McCarthy: I do not have much to say on the issue, other than that I support the motion. I will take this opportunity to congratulate Mark Durkan and his mate Alasdair on their success in last week's election. I also congratulate my new MP, Jim Shannon, who has left the Chamber. Well done to everyone concerned.

I thank Mark Durkan and his colleagues for bringing the motion to the Assembly Floor. As a member of a local credit union, I recognise that the credit union movement has provided an excellent service to all its members for many years. The Assembly discussed the needs of credit unions in, I think, February 2007.

Mr Durkan: It was 2009.

Mr McCarthy: Sorry, that is right. It was February 2009.

It is disappointing, to say the least, that more progress has not been forthcoming. As with any other issue, circumstances do not stand still. Credit unions want their members to benefit from new and enhanced opportunities, and, as a public representative, I fully endorse that ideal. I am glad that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is with us today. The motion calls on her to pursue the appropriate legislative change with the incoming Chancellor, and I have no doubt that she will do so. The Alliance Party fully supports the motion.

Mr Cree: I support the motion and wish to express my recognition of the valuable work that is carried out by credit unions across Northern Ireland. My party's view remains the same as the one that it expressed in February 2009, and we are disappointed that there has been only limited progress.

The credit union movement has grown over the past 50 years, and it continues to have a bright future in Northern Ireland. Credit unions play an increasing role as financial service providers, particularly to those on lower incomes. Credit unions in Northern Ireland date back to the early 1960s, and there are now some 180 unions, with over 400,000 members, serving 50% of the adult population.

Despite their popularity, and compared with their counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of

Ireland, credit unions have a limited opportunity to provide a wide range of services. Also, access to compensation in the event of failure is uneven in Northern Ireland, as some 26 credit unions have no protection at all. Bringing credit unions under the regulation of the Financial Services Authority would provide certainty with regard to compensation arrangements for all credit union members in Northern Ireland. At this time of economic uncertainty, it is critical that we protect the most economically vulnerable in society.

Across the world, credit unions are increasingly integrated into mainstream financial services regulation and given greater freedom to offer services to their members and communities. Many in the credit union movement in Northern Ireland have campaigned for a long time to have a range of services similar to those enjoyed by other groups in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. Most credit unions welcome the opportunity to extend their services to the community and, in particular, the opportunity to help people to save. In the current economic climate, it is important that we encourage everyone to start or to continue saving. In this instance, there is, however, a need for clearer rules and greater protection for those savers.

It is widely acknowledged that the credit union sector in Northern Ireland is stable, and there have been no failures for nearly a decade. However, that does not negate the need for protection. Allowing the FSA to regulate credit unions in Northern Ireland would enable compensation of up to £50,000 to be paid in the event of a failure.

The capacity of credit unions to help the local economy through supporting community enterprise is another useful benefit. Some local credit unions will wish to expand that. Reinvestment of assets can bring significant benefit to community infrastructure.

Like other Members, I call on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work with whatever new UK Government is formed to pursue the necessary change in legislation to give credit unions and their members the appropriate regulation, protection and choice, which is already bestowed on others in the United Kingdom. I support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: It is important to recognise that many in the credit union movement would say that change is long overdue. Nonetheless,

the motion is timely. We are on the cusp of a change of Government and the formation of a new Parliament at Westminster. Therefore, the opportunity arises for the necessary amendments to be made to primary legislation and for the consequent secondary legislation to be introduced. It is important that those changes take place.

We missed an opportunity in the last Parliament; there is no doubt about that. Mark Durkan's efforts in that respect should not be overlooked. They were important. He identified an opportunity, but his efforts were effectively obstructed; initially, by the Treasury at Westminster and, subsequently, by the British Conservative Party in the penultimate stage of the last Parliament, during the wash-up period when issues outstanding in the legislative programme were settled. That was most unfortunate, and we will have to make up for it in the new Parliament.

It is important that those who discuss matters of legislative importance with the incoming Government bring this issue to their attention, whatever hue that Government might take. Our MPs must emphasise the importance of tabling an amendment that will provide the necessary legislative key to unlock the changes that will benefit credit unions here in Northern Ireland.

We are the only part of these islands in which credit unions do not have the extended powers and services that credit unions in Britain and the Republic of Ireland enjoy. It is wrong for our credit unions, which command very high standing in the community, to be deprived of that opportunity. Credit unions here are very important at local and community level. Fifty per cent of the adult population belong to a credit union, so they are not an insubstantial or inconsequential element of our society. For many families, their credit union is an important source of financial potential and stability. It can assist people with home improvements and other aspects of ordinary human living. Therefore, we owe the credit union movement our support in helping it to obtain extended services.

I take heart from the fact that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment issued a joint consultation paper with the Treasury on 30 March this year. I welcome that paper and the Minister's constant support. I hope that we can now, in the new Parliament, achieve the necessary legislative amendments that will

result in an expansion of credit union services in Northern Ireland.

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

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

In a period of financial uncertainty, credit unions stand out as a pillar of stability. It is important that we support them.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion, and I thank the Members who brought it to the Chamber for debate. I have spoken on the matter before, sometimes by making full speeches and sometimes by making interventions. I am very aware of the role that credit unions play, and by extension, the role that the Department and the Minister play. I have always been impressed by the Department's work in that regard. It is very clear that the Minister is keen to support credit unions in whatever way she can.

The case of the Presbyterian Mutual Society is particularly important to me because of the number of my constituents who have contacted me about it. The longer that the situation has gone on, the more that my thoughts have turned to the absolute necessity of ensuring that the protection that is available on the mainland be extended to credit unions in the Province. That is where we are coming from, and that should always have been the case. The last time that we debated credit unions, we all made it clear how essential they are to life in the Province. I point to the fact that more than a quarter of the population are members of a credit union. The credit unions in my constituency of Strangford play a critical role. Kieran McCarthy spoke about that earlier. He and I are aware of the important work that they do and of the fact that they make money available to their members. They give people opportunities.

The credit crunch is still in play, and many families are struggling to make ends meet to pay for everyday outgoings. When an unexpected bill arrives, such as one for car or boiler repairs, sometimes the only way in which to deal with it is to take a loan from a credit union. That is something that people have done for a great many years. Sometimes the work that credit unions do is unsolicited or goes unnoticed, but, nonetheless, they play a critical role.

Credit unions have a long and successful history in Northern Ireland, where there are

approximately 170 of them. That is in contrast to the UK mainland, where approximately 1% of the population are members. Credit unions on the mainland are anxious to solidify and to encourage growth in the credit union sector.

1.45 pm

In Northern Ireland, credit unions play an important and critical role, so we should do our best to support and to help them. The credit union movement portrays itself as the people's bank. It is run by ordinary people for ordinary people, and it does not make a profit. The success of the credit union movement in Northern Ireland has been attributed to its promotion by established community groups and religious organisations and to its by the community, for all of the community ethos.

Credit unions in Northern Ireland are governed by one primary and four subordinate pieces of legislation. They receive no Government funding, whereas credit unions in the rest of the UK have access to a £36 million growth fund for third-sector lenders. In 2007-08, that fund was bolstered by a further £6 million, and in its recent paper on financial inclusion, Her Majesty's Treasury Select Committee recognised the important role that third-sector lenders play in promoting financial inclusion. The Treasury Select Committee also made important recommendations designed to increase the coverage and capacity of third-sector lenders. However, none of those recommendations applies to credit unions in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the extent to which they can change and grow is limited, particularly when one considers that credit unions in the Province receive huge support.

In common with other Members, including Alban Maginness, I am disappointed that legislation has not been passed, and I thank the proposer of the motion and other Members for pointing out that it was the Conservative Party's failure to support an amendment in the House of Lords that led us to where we are today. I support the motion to bring that support to the fore. The Minister has not forgotten the importance of such support, and she and her Department will continue to make representations.

Mr Dallat: I declare an interest as the treasurer of one of the most successful credit unions in the North, the Kilrea, Rasharkin and Dunloy Credit Union. In election times, one has to boast.

As other Members said, the failure to obtain the necessary legislation is disappointing, because there is an absolute necessity to empower credit unions, particularly in times of economic decline. I remind Members that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, during one of the worst economic recessions, the credit union movement in Ireland expanded rapidly. Out of that poverty, which bears no relation to circumstances now, the credit union movement brought hope, leadership and financial stability to many people who, in those days, were not allowed through the door of a bank. The current situation is quite different, and, indeed, many banks now exploit people.

I could talk about the credit union movement's impact on the third world, particularly, in recent years, on Africa. Credit unions have given dignity to people who would otherwise have endured absolute poverty. It is important to make the point that the credit union movement is an international organisation, with huge potential for rescuing people from the gombeen men who often exploit their poverty. No matter where one is, the principles of the credit union movement are the same, and we must ensure that its potential is not stifled or strangled.

In a material world, we recognise that people's loyalty to the co-operative movement, of which credit unions are an important element, is, regrettably, not as strong as it should be. Perhaps that puts even greater pressure on the Government to ensure that the credit union movement is supported as it competes against credit card providers, loan sharks, and so forth.

Compared with when the credit union movement expanded rapidly in Ireland — I pay tribute to John Hume, who was a founder member — we live in a different kind of world. People are now being exploited by loan sharks and have different needs. Therefore, it is critical to expand the range of services that credit unions can deliver.

The credit union movement is probably at a crossroads. It can stand still or, in some cases, even decline. Therefore, in our changing financial world, it is essential that the credit union movement be allowed to repackage itself, take on the additional responsibilities that clearly exist and move on.

I pay tribute to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for its contribution to the credit union movement, for the help that

the Department has provided and for the scrutiny that it has imposed, all of which have been accepted positively. There is deep regret that the Department will have a less involved role in the future than the Financial Services Authority, which, it is worth noting, has no regional presence here. Therefore, I encourage the Minister to pursue appropriate legislation with the incoming Chancellor of the Exchequer as a priority. The credit union movement is vital. Without wishing to show any party political favouritism, I must pay tribute to Mark Durkan, who has used his position at Westminster to keep the credit union issue alive and to enable it, I hope, to become a top priority for the new Government, whoever forms it.

My local credit union recently received the Investors in People award, and I thank the Department for its encouragement and guidance in achieving that.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster):

All Members are well aware of the important role and contribution of the credit union movement in all parts of Northern Ireland, and we have heard Members talk about some of the people who were involved in its early days. We heard of the work of former Foyle MP John Hume. For the sake of parity, I also want to pay tribute to the work of Rev Martin Smyth in the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions. A lot of good men and true, and indeed women, have driven forward the credit union movement over the years by sticking with local projects and by recognising its importance. The role and influence of credit unions are likely to increase under my Department's policy to extend the range of services that they can offer.

I want to update the Assembly on the progress that has been made and the steps that are under way to expand the services that credit unions will be able to offer, while enjoying the added assurance that savers will have the same level of protection as credit union members on the mainland. I have long recognised that neighbourhood credit unions are the prime source of affordable credit for many members of the community, particularly those on those on lower incomes. The long-established and widespread presence of the credit union movement in Northern Ireland has been crucial in helping to engender a strong culture of community self-help, which, as Mr Dallat pointed out, we should have no difficulty in recognising. Credit unions also help to promote financial

inclusion by, among other things, tackling the serious problem of loan sharks.

We have also heard that credit unions have long held a special place in Northern Ireland society. However, as Members may be aware, since 2002, when their counterparts in Great Britain were brought under the regulatory umbrella of the FSA, credit unions here have been limited in the services that they have been permitted to offer. Credit union members here are excluded from the financial protection offered by the FSA compensation scheme and are denied access to the Financial Ombudsman Service. Another key issue that is often raised with me is that access to child trust schemes would become available to credit union members here only when regulatory responsibility for credit unions is transferred from my Department to the FSA.

Mr Dallat's point about the FSA not having a regional presence here came through strongly in the Committee's report on credit unions. I know that the Department is concerned about that as well, and we will continue to keep our eye on it.

The Committee's report was a key document in informing the Treasury's separate review of the regulatory framework for credit unions and industrial and provident societies in Northern Ireland, of which mention has been made and which was published in July 2009. That review noted that, compared with their counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, credit unions in Northern Ireland have a limited opportunity to offer the wide range of services that they seek to provide. On a more positive note, the review confirmed the robustness of the Northern Ireland credit union movement and openly acknowledged that in an eight-year period, during which 32 credit unions in Great Britain failed, none in Northern Ireland failed. That is a welcome acknowledgement of the high degree to which our credit unions are managed and regulated.

It is also worth noting that in the context of the current global financial crisis, the Treasury review reported that there was no evidence to suggest that the uncertain financial environment had weakened the credit union structure in Northern Ireland. That was a heartening endorsement. Like the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's report, the Treasury review rejected the option of maintaining the status quo. It also recommended that the UK Government, together with the Assembly, should

consult on bringing Northern Ireland credit unions within the scope of Financial Services Authority regulation and, in that way, bring certainty on compensation arrangements for all members.

I thank the proposer, Mark Durkan, for the fair way in which he presented the background to where we find ourselves and, not least, for the amendment that he tried to get accepted in the House of Commons. I thank him for his comments. I have made efforts to have the amendment carried in the House of Lords, and he will know that I contacted the Treasury. I also had the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Ian Pearson, agree to the inclusion of a Government amendment to effect the removal of the exemption from a date to be determined. Regrettably, we have heard that it was lost in the wash-up, as a result of the Conservative Party not backing the amendment in the House of Lords. That is deeply disappointing; it could have been done on the whim of anybody. It was not going to cause any impact in Great Britain. It was for the benefit of Northern Ireland people, and it is something that I will seek to address with the new Secretary of State, whoever that may be, initially, and, subsequently, with the Economic Secretary to the Treasury in the Chancellor's office.

In any case, as Members have acknowledged, the inclusion of the amendment would have been only the first of several legislative steps required at Westminster and here. I will continue to try to get that initial stage carried out as quickly as possible. We are looking at ways of doing that — not with primary legislation, but with secondary legislation. There is a commitment in the Treasury to do that. However, I register the concern that has been acknowledged by the proposer of the motion in relation to the Conservative Party's policy to take all regulation back to the Bank of England, because that would, inevitably, slow down anything that we would wish to do in relation to the credit unions. We will keep a tight eye on that and watch how it progresses.

I have one point to address in relation to a query that was raised by Mr McLaughlin on why the consultation had to be UK-wide, when it affected only Northern Ireland. It had to be a UK consultation, because we were trying to amend a Bill that applied only to GB.

As I have indicated, I will take up the question of the implementation of the appropriate legislation

with the incoming Administration at a very early stage. I reassure Members that I will do all that I can to ensure that it happens as soon as is practicable.

Finally, I pay tribute again to the credit union movement across Northern Ireland and to the vital role that it plays in society, which, I must say, is in support of the Executive and Assembly's policy, particularly on promoting greater community self-sufficiency, self-confidence and financial inclusion.

2.00 pm

Dr McDonnell: It is a privilege to stand here in order to gather together a few thoughts about a motion on which we are all agreed. It is clear from all the comments made that change is long overdue. Credit unions do a magnificent job for all of us, and, in many cases, they have the capacity to do much more. Therefore, we should create a space for them to do that.

Better legislation, allowing a wider role, is essential, and I compliment the Minister on her past efforts to get that moving. Unfortunately, it was allowed to slip away in the wash-up of the last Parliament, but it must be brought into effect quickly. There is a need for Northern Ireland credit unions to have fuller powers and a much wider role. We are all agreed on that.

One of the big issues with some of the credit unions was being allowed to handle the Child Trust Fund. The Minister referred to that, and I hope that credit unions will be allowed to handle it before the Conservatives eliminate it altogether. Furthermore, we must avoid at all costs allowing banks, which have created various problems, to corrupt or to contaminate the legislation, because credit unions are essential and provide a vital role in Northern Ireland for people on low incomes.

I compliment everyone who spoke in the debate and thank them for their efforts. I will start with Mark Durkan, who outlined the need for credit unions to be allowed to become bigger and better where appropriate and where they felt that they were able to do so. He mentioned the Committee report and the positive Treasury response. He mentioned the Bill and how the Treasury took a complicated view of the whole thing, creating problems and shortfalls, and how the Bill slipped on us with the dissolution of Parliament. He went on to talk about credit

unions wanting change, and he fully supported the Minister in her efforts.

Mitchel McLaughlin endorsed Mark's comments. He said that the case that we were making was unanswerable and fully supported the debate. Kieran McCarthy threw his weight behind the effort to expand the role of credit unions and noted that the enhanced role that we were suggesting could have and should have been implemented a long time ago. Leslie Cree went into a lot of detail on credit unions and mentioned the need for the law to change. He mentioned the need for robust protection and said that it was essential that we secure and protect any vulnerable credit unions. However, other Members mentioned that none of our credit unions has been insolvent. Alban Maginness mentioned the urgent need for change and outlined many of the benefits. Jim Shannon, like others, complimented the credit unions and the work that they do and fully supported the motion. John Dallat declared his interest and shared some of the history of credit unions with us. He also reminded us that the FSA does not really have a local presence.

I thank the Minister for her comments, for her kind tribute to John Hume and Martin Smyth and, generally, for throwing her weight behind credit unions. We are all very aware of the effort that she has made, and we urge her to keep up that effort and to find whatever means possible to use those of us who have been elected to Westminster or wherever to work this through, because it is one issue that affects people at the grass roots. Every day, I go out and meet people who are on very low incomes and find that credit unions help them in their struggle to plan and to budget their finances.

I thank Kieran McCarthy for his kind compliment to me on my re-election, and I add my good wishes to Jim Shannon, who escaped from the Chamber earlier, Mark Durkan and others in the Chamber who have been re-elected. I thank all Members for supporting the motion. It is a privilege to deal with a motion that has unanimous support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly reaffirms its resolution of 17 February 2009 on the report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, unanimously supporting the expansion of credit union services

including through their future regulation by the Financial Services Authority; notes the Treasury paper of 8 July 2009 which accepted the Assembly's key recommendations on credit union regulation and service enhancement; regrets that the opportunity to deliver necessary change in primary legislation through amendment to the Financial Services Bill in Westminster was lost; welcomes the current consultation by the Treasury and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on "Proposals for regulatory reform of credit unions in Northern Ireland"; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to pursue appropriate legislative change with the incoming Chancellor as a matter of priority.

The sitting was suspended at 2.06 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Children and Young People

1. **Ms Purvis** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will seek to establish a statutory duty to require Departments to co-operate on the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people. (AQO 1173/10)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I will ask junior Minister Kelly to answer question 1.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Although children's services planning falls within the remit of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the welfare of our children and young people is a cross-cutting issue. Children and young people remain a priority for Ministers and the Executive. However, we do not seek to introduce a statutory duty to co-operate on the planning and commissioning of services for young people. Individual Ministers need to be able to identify their own priorities and to take appropriate policy decisions that are relevant to the work of their Department. To achieve that, they also need to have direct control over their own departmental budgets.

We recognise that many of the issues that relate specifically to children and young people are cross-cutting, requiring co-operation across Departments. We re-established the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people in 2008, with the aim of improving their lives. Through the subcommittee's workings, children and young people are placed at the heart of the Government's agenda. Not only does that facilitate better joined-up working and achieve transparency through timely sharing of information but it aims to achieve greater integration of policy funding and service delivery relevant to children and young people. That

forum also enables us to agree joint priorities on identified and emerging issues and to take those priorities forward collaboratively while continuing to drive forward the 10-year strategy to achieve improved outcomes for all our children and young people.

To support the subcommittee, we established champions for children and young people who act as a senior point of contact in each Department and help drive forward agreed policies. Champions raise awareness at departmental board level to encourage Departments to ensure that children and young people's issues are jointly fostered.

We are committed to ensuring that children and young people's issues remain high on the Government's agenda and will continue to drive that work forward through the ministerial subcommittee.

Ms Purvis: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. I acknowledge the work that the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people has done.

Does the Minister agree that, because the issues that affect children and young people are cross-cutting and the current system depends on the goodwill of those who come to the table, a statutory duty to co-operate on the planning and commissioning of children's services is needed? A statutory duty would ensure the delivery of quality services while addressing the system's inefficiencies and cutting down on duplication.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): I understand the Member's viewpoint. However, the matter was discussed. I do not think that we can interfere with ministerial budgets or put that type of statutory duty on Ministers. Bearing in mind that it is a ministerial subcommittee, which is attached to the Executive, the reason that it was set up was precisely to ensure that Ministers would attend to the issues and that keen focus would be put on them. For that reason, we decided against establishing a statutory duty.

Mr Kennedy: Can the junior Minister provide the Assembly with an update on the child poverty situation in Northern Ireland? Can he indicate any updated timescales for the alleviation, leading to the eradication, of child poverty here?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people has six priorities. It has reported on five of those priorities. The one on which it has not reported is precisely the one about which the Member asked. As soon as we have an update, I will send the information to the Member.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is good that, for the first time, there are champions for children and young people in Departments. It is also good and relevant to hear that children are at the heart of the Government's agenda. There has been much discussion of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. Can the junior Minister update the House specifically on the subcommittee's current position?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): Through the workings of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people, the six objectives of the 10-year strategy for children and young people, which I mentioned in response to Danny Kennedy's question, are being driven forward. Ministers are members of the ministerial subcommittee and seek jointly to drive forward cross-cutting issues for children and young people here.

Six cross-cutting key priorities for action have been identified. Those are child poverty; early years; vulnerable young people; safeguarding; provision, including transitions, for children with a disability or mental health condition; and the provision of school buses. Six subgroups have also been established to take forward the work on those key priorities, and five have completed action plans that the Executive formally agreed on 25 March 2010. As I indicated, the action plan of the child poverty subgroup is still being considered. The next meeting of the ministerial subcommittee is scheduled for Tuesday 29 June 2010.

Children and Young People's Unit

2. **Mr McDevitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they sought the advice of the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner and the United Nations to determine whether the abolition of a dedicated children and young persons unit within their Department complies with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (AQO 1174/10)

The deputy First Minister: A Cheann Comhairle, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Kelly to respond to that question as well. He is earning his keep today.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat. The work of the children and young people's unit will continue. It is a priority both in the Programme for Government and given our commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The restructuring that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has undergone has come about for two reasons: first, to provide a better service for our stakeholders by focusing on our core priorities; and, secondly, to enable us to do that in a more flexible manner. In short, we need the Department to be more strategic, effective and efficient than before. In developing our new structures, discussions took place with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

The concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in October 2008 recommended that:

"the State party — in addition to ensuring that each of the jurisdictions has a well resourced and functioning coordinating body — could allocate responsibility for the coordination and evaluation of the Convention across the State party to a single, high-profile mechanism."

That position has not changed, and we continue to see the 10-year strategy for children and young people and the associated action plans as the main vehicles for taking forward the committee's concluding observations here. We will keep the new structures under review, and, if changes are needed, our new, more flexible structures will enable us to make them.

Mr McDevitt: Do the deputy First Minister, the First Minister and, indeed, the junior Minister accept that such bodies and dedicated units still exist in Scotland and Wales and that section 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires the Executive to have a dedicated and specific team?

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

Mr McDevitt: Therefore, does the junior Minister accept that what happened was in breach of section 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): I do not accept that. In bringing forward recommendations on the proposed new organisational structure in the equality directorate and economic policy unit, consultants from the Department of Finance and Personnel's delivery and innovation division were asked to meet a wide range of stakeholders to establish their views on the way in which the directorate currently operates and on how a combined directorate might best meet stakeholders' needs. The themes that stakeholders identified during the consultation process centred on various elements, including the purpose of a combined equality directorate and economic policy unit; the capability and expertise of staff; resources; the use of stakeholder expertise; strategic prioritisation; communication and relationships with stakeholders; and comments on the MATRIX system. As part of that process, delivery and innovation division consultants met Patricia Lewsley, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, on 26 October 2009.

Mr Campbell: One of the rights of the child is to be free from the threat of sexual abuse. Does the junior Minister agree that it is essential that those who have been abused deserve the total support of all politicians in bringing their abusers to justice?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): I am very pleased to agree with the Member. I think that the whole Assembly would agree that they deserve the support of all elected representatives and of society as a whole.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Returning to the junior Minister's previous answer, was consultation carried out with stakeholders on the proposed organisational change?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): In bringing forward recommendations on the proposed new organisational structure in the equality directorate and economic policy unit, consultants from the Department of Finance and Personnel's delivery and innovation division were asked to meet a wide range of stakeholders to establish their views. Therefore, that consultation was carried out. I detailed the list of stakeholders who were consulted, so I will not go through it again.

UK Government

3. **Mr Easton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they intend to meet, following the election, with the Prime Minister and his Administration. (AQO 1175/10)

The deputy First Minister: Members can rest assured that, once agreement has been reached on a new Administration in London, we will seek a meeting with the new British Prime Minister at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Easton: Will the deputy First Minister assure me that, no matter who the Prime Minister may be, he and the First Minister will do all that they can to protect the block grant for Northern Ireland, especially if there is a Conservative Government, who could cut the block grant by £200 million?

The deputy First Minister: I can give an absolute assurance that the First Minister and I and all members of the Executive recognise that this is a time of change. As I came into the Chamber, there appeared to be well-founded speculation in London that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives are coming to an agreement about the future shape of government. That poses real challenges to us, given that, in interviews prior to the election, the Conservative Party made it clear that it intended to target the public sector in the North. The First Minister and I are very concerned about that. At the earliest opportunity, when the shape of the next Government in London becomes clear, the First Minister and I will seek a meeting as a matter of urgency with the person who enters Number 10.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the deputy First Minister's response on the block grant. Will he go further by saying whether it is his and the First Minister's intention to raise with whoever becomes Prime Minister of Britain the proposal to introduce proportional representation to Westminster elections?

The deputy First Minister: To be honest, there have been no discussions between the First Minister and me on that issue. If it were the wish of the Assembly to address the issue, we could have a conversation about it and see whether we could reach agreement on it. I will not express any opinion at this stage for fear that my opinion might be different even from that of the Member. It is not an issue that is foremost in our minds.

Foremost in our minds are the financial implications of a new Government in London and the speed with which they will attempt to move on the signals that were sent out prior to the election on what many people here would see as an attack on the public sector. At a time of recession and world economic downturn, high levels of unemployment exist down South, in England, Scotland and Wales and in Spain, where unemployment has reached 20%. We appreciate that the public sector effectively saved us in the North from those levels. Therefore, it is incumbent on all of us in the Assembly to unite to oppose any proposed cuts, which would eat into a sector that has provided so much support for our economy at a difficult time.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The deputy First Minister has raised the issue that I planned to raise, which was to call for unity among all the parties in an effort to oppose and resist cuts and any negative impact on our public services. I congratulate the deputy First Minister on answering my question.

Mrs Long: In line with what has been said about the importance of Northern Ireland presenting a united front on such issues, are the First Minister and deputy First Minister willing to meet all who have been elected as MPs in the hope not only of having a united front from the 13 of us who will be voting on those situations but of aligning our priorities with those of the Executive?

The deputy First Minister: I congratulate Naomi on her success in the election. I reiterate what Members from different political parties that are represented in the Assembly have said on a number of occasions: we should work together to put up a broad front against the prospect that damaging cuts will be inflicted on our public sector and, furthermore, our economy. In the coming days, the First Minister and I will be keenly engaged as we see the shape of the Administration in London. We will be anxious to work with everyone in the Assembly and with everyone who has been elected as a Member of Parliament to ensure that we put up a united front against what could be very damaging economic circumstances.

2.45 pm

FM/DFM: US Visit

4. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the cost

of their recent visit to the USA for St Patrick's Day. (AQO 1176/10)

The deputy First Minister: As Members are aware, the First Minister and I undertook a successful visit to the United States of America over the St Patrick's Day period in March. We carried out a joint programme of events in Chicago, focusing on the business community, before travelling to Washington DC for a series of engagements, culminating in an exceptionally useful round-table session at the White House with President Obama, Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Clinton. The First Minister then travelled to Houston, Texas, where he met the management of Baker Hughes, while I travelled to New York where I met the city and state comptrollers. We were each accompanied by one special adviser, one private secretary and one press officer. A local photographer travelled with us to record the programme, and the cost of that service was met jointly by a number of Departments. The cost of the visit was £58,455, which included flights, hotels, trains, cars, photography and subsistence. That figure also included the cost of the gifts that we presented to the various dignitaries whom we met, including President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and Mayor Daley of Chicago.

It is important that those costs be seen in the overall context of the purpose of the visit. Few European regions or states enjoy the access that we do; therefore it is imperative that we use St Patrick's Day to maximum effect. We had unparalleled access to some of the most senior decision makers in corporate and political spheres in the United States, many of whom influence investment decisions here. As I have said before, the sensitive and commercial-in-confidence nature of our discussions with potential inward investors means that we cannot provide details of those discussions. However, our discussions with current investors during previous visits have paid dividends in the creation of new jobs here and in the development of our economy.

On a more immediate level, President Obama confirmed his support for the work that we are doing to lobby Congress for its continued contribution to the International Fund for Ireland, and he confirmed his personal support for the planned economic conference in Washington in October. Members will agree that it is vital to continue to lever in the support that is available in the United States on as many levels

as possible. I was pleased to see ministerial colleagues and other Members at a range of events that we attended, which further underlined the cross-party support for the political arrangements here.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for that extensive overview of his trip. Are details available of any tangible benefits with regard to investment or potential investment?

The deputy First Minister: In the past year alone, some of America's best-known brand names have invested here. The New York Stock Exchange announced that it would expand its technologies division in Belfast, which would create up to 400 new jobs. Universal Pictures completed the filming of 'Your Highness', a multimillion dollar feature film at the Paint Hall in Belfast; that film infused nearly £10 million into the local economy, employing hundreds of cast and crew from the North. In June, HBO will begin filming 'Game of Thrones' in the Paint Hall, a nine-part television series that could be worth £20 million to the local economy. Despite the most economically difficult year in living memory, we have succeeded in attracting significant inward investment. We have competed with other regions and have won significant investment. We are outperforming others because investors recognise that we have the talent and the expertise to build and grow their business.

Members will be conscious that Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama are anxious to assist us with inward investment. The decision to appoint Declan Kelly as the economic envoy to the North is strong testament to their support for that project. Declan Kelly has, in our view, hit the ground running. He has built up a huge number of contacts, both in the United States and here on the island of Ireland. He is keen to succeed in the task that he was given, and I am confident that future benefits will flow from his appointment.

Mr Spratt: Does the deputy First Minister agree that the amount of money spent — I think that he mentioned some £58,000 — was, in fact, well spent in relation to Northern Ireland and that such exercises have proved to be very worthwhile for the Province, not only recently but in the past?

The deputy First Minister: Yes. As I said in my previous answer, there are few countries in the

world with the level of access that we have in the United States. In fact, when we were there we were told that the Dutch Government had been trying to get a meeting with President Obama for the greater part of a year and had not yet succeeded. That clearly shows that the Administration there understand the importance of what is happening here and of underpinning the political developments that have occurred by bringing about economic investment in the North. I think that it was money well spent, and I believe that the more we build our contacts in the United States and allow people there to visit here — as many are keen to do — the more it will, ultimately, be to the benefit of the primary objective of the Programme for Government, which is developing our economy.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I remind Members that they must continue to rise in their place if they wish to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Gardiner: What cutbacks on travel have the Northern Ireland Executive and Departments made, and what savings have been made since the Finance Minister announced £370 million in cuts?

The deputy First Minister: I am not sure that that question is related to the question about the cost of the visit to the United States of America. However, there can be no doubt whatsoever that all Departments, including the Department of Finance and Personnel, are conscious of the need to ensure that public money is used wisely. There is a responsibility on all Departments to ensure that money used wisely is accounted for in a way that Assembly Members can access through the House, and all Departments have their own approach to that.

Commissioner for Older People

5. **Mr Leonard** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of a Commissioner for Older People. (AQO 1177/10)

The deputy First Minister: I will ask junior Minister Kelly to respond to question 5.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is committed to establishing a Commissioner for Older People, and the Executive's Programme for Government gave a commitment to provide a strong, independent voice for older people. However, before a commissioner can

be appointed, we need to bring legislation to the Assembly. On 1 October 2009, junior Minister Newton and I launched the public consultation on the proposals to establish a Commissioner for Older People at an event in the Everglades Hotel to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Older Persons. The consultation included the policy proposals and the draft Bill, as well as commentary on the clauses.

As part of the consultation, in November 2009, our Department conducted nine public consultation events here. Over 400 people attended that series of events, and the level of engagement and participation by older people was very encouraging. The consultation concluded on 7 January 2010, and 80 written responses have been received. The Department will publish a response to the consultation in due course. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will consider the draft Bill at its next meeting on Wednesday 12 May. Following that, the Bill will be sent to the Executive for their consideration and approval.

Following consideration by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and Executive clearance, we intend to introduce the Bill in the Assembly in June. Subject to the consideration of the Assembly, we are hopeful that the Bill will be passed within the lifetime of the current Assembly. The commissioner could then, hopefully, be appointed in early spring or early in 2011.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his detailed reply and that indicative timetable. I simply ask him to assure the Assembly that he will do all in his power and the office's power to stick to that indicative timetable.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): I can give that commitment. Everyone, particularly in that sector, is impatient to get that through. It took five years to appoint an older persons commissioner for Wales, but we are well ahead in comparison with that time frame.

Mr Speaker: I call Jimmy Spratt. I am sorry: I call Jim Shannon to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Shannon: Jimmy is right, but the other part is wrong.

My figures and statistics show that the grey vote will rise dramatically over the next period of time. Ever mindful of that fact and the fact that a lot of Members in the Chamber are heading towards that more quickly than others, I ask what steps are being taken to address those issues with older people's organisations to ensure that sufficient resources are set aside to look after them.

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): First, I congratulate Jim Shannon on being elected MP for Strangford. The Member will be aware that Dame Joan Harbison was appointed Older People's Advocate in December 2008 to ensure that the sector has a direct voice in government in the period before the commissioner's appointment. Dame Joan's role includes providing independent advice to government, vocalising the issues and concerns of older people and acting as a liaison between the Government and the sector. As Older People's Advocate, Dame Joan will remain in post until the appointment of the commissioner. She helped to launch the consultation on the Commissioner for Older People on 1 October 2009 and chaired the public consultation events in November 2009.

Mr McCarthy: Will the junior Minister assure the House that the shenanigans that took place during the appointment of the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland will not be repeated and that we will not end up with four commissioners rather than one efficient commissioner?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): I assure the Member.

Parades Working Group

6. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the proposals of the parades working group.
(AQO 1178/10)

The deputy First Minister: The consultation on the draft Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests Bill began on 20 April and will run for 12 weeks until 14 July. The draft Bill was informed by the report of the working group on parades and details the proposals for the future handling of all issues related to public assemblies, including parades and protests, and the new structures that will be created.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Will he outline what discussions, if any, he, the First Minister or the parades working group has had with the Northern Ireland Court Service or the judiciary, given the ability of not only parade organisers but those who wish to protest to seek judicial review of decisions?

The deputy First Minister: I cannot give any information on the confidential discussions that took place during that process. However, I can say that we now have a consultation process that will last for some time and that, during that time, Members of the House and the public will have every opportunity to have their say on any aspect of the outcome of the working party's deliberations.

Mr McNarry: Will the Minister give a definition of sectarian harassment? Will he explain how the clause will operate in practice?

The deputy First Minister: We are all conscious that sectarian harassment can occur in nearly any sphere of society. The working group was established to deal with the issue of sectarian harassment in relation to parades or assemblies. The fact that the working group successfully concluded its discussions, that its work went to drafters and that they came forward with legislation that is now out for consultation are achievements that many people predicted would not be possible, but we achieved them. We now have an ongoing and real opportunity for people to contribute to that consultation. It is not my job to stand here today to deal with individual aspects of the work that we are going to deal with over the next while. Once the consultation process has concluded, legislation will be put before the House. There will be every opportunity for people to explore every aspect of that.

Given what can be the fractious nature of dealing with these issues, I appeal to all Members to approach this responsibly and in the spirit of co-operation and to try to lead by example. We must show the people on the streets, whether those who wish to march or those who wish others not to march, that the sensible way forward is through dialogue, through coming together to have reasonable discussions, and through reaching conclusions that all sides can live with. Given the tremendous recent progress, none of that is beyond us.

3.00 pm

Mr McHugh: On a point of order.

Mr Speaker: I am happy to take your point of order after Question Time.

Mr McHugh: It is a point of order. I have listened to —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McHugh: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr McHugh: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat.

Mr McHugh: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr McHugh: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: I will have to ask the Member to leave the Chamber.

Mr McHugh: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: The Member should take his seat.

Mr McHugh: I am not going to sit down and listen to this nonsense. We had to listen to —

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr McHugh: I am not going to sit down. Can this Assembly do nothing —

Mr Speaker: I have no choice but to suspend the sitting until we can bring some order to the House.

The sitting was suspended at 3.01 pm and resumed at 3.02 pm.

Mr Speaker: Every Member, from all sides of the House, had the opportunity to ask a supplementary question or to table a question to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for oral answer. Obviously that did not happen.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

First Trust Bank

1. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel to offset any potential job losses as a result of the sale of the First Trust Bank. (AQO 1188/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I look forward to the 'Fermanagh Herald' this week.

I have not discussed with the Minister of Finance and Personnel this week's decision of the Allied Irish Bank to put First Trust Bank up for sale; however, the Finance Minister recently met representatives of the banking union to discuss the issue. He made it clear that the Executive would not intervene in commercial decisions taken by the board of Allied Irish Bank. That said, through Invest Northern Ireland, my Department will seek, as necessary, to enter into discussions with any prospective buyer to explore options to safeguard jobs in Northern Ireland.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is interesting that the Member pulled his stunt just before the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was due to speak. If he wanted to ask a question, she is the person to ask it of. However, back to business.

There is palpable anger against bankers, but that anger is not directed at those bank staff who have to work, like everyone else, to secure their jobs and mortgages. The sale of First Trust Bank has caused major concerns among bank workers for the future of their jobs. The Minister said that Invest NI will meet any prospective new owners of the bank, and I welcome that. However, I ask that she also meet any new owners to ensure that continued investment is made in First Trust Bank and that we can secure as many jobs as possible in that system.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am more than happy to meet the new buyers when they come on board. The current situation, as the Member is aware, is that the Republic of Ireland's financial regulator has indicated that the Allied Irish Bank needs to raise £7.4 billion by the end of the year. First Trust Bank employs approximately 1,500 people in Northern Ireland and was recently put up for sale by its Dublin-based parent company in an effort to rebuild the balance sheet. I will meet the workers and am

more than happy to meet the new owners, who are key for Invest Northern Ireland.

Mr Bell: Will the Minister outline the Department's work on Quinn Insurance in relation to the First Trust Bank, other banks and other parts of the financial services industry? Will she tell us her key targets for wealth creation through providing jobs in the financial services sector?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is incredibly disappointing that a Member sought to raise a point of order before my questions started. We have been working very hard on the situation with Quinn Insurance, which is a strategic issue in Fermanagh due to the impact that any job losses would have on that county. Just last week, I announced that Leslie Ross CB will co-ordinate the activities of my Department, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Invest Northern Ireland, InterTradeIreland and local councils in response to the problems facing Quinn Insurance.

I hope to go to Fermanagh with Leslie on Wednesday afternoon to meet people affected. I continue to meet with the employees of Quinn Insurance and the wider business community. Tomorrow, I will meet with the Irish Financial Regulator to discuss issues that have been brought to me by the employees, particularly in relation to the loading of insurance policies that they can now sell. As the Member knows, we wanted to get the UK market open again to Quinn Insurance, which has happened to all intents and purposes. However, there has been a certain loading put on insurance policies, and there are huge issues surrounding that. So, I am meeting the Irish Financial Regulator tomorrow to bring those issues directly to him.

Obviously, it has been a difficult time for the financial services sector. Market conditions for the international financial services sector are likely to remain very challenging, and there is greater pressure on firms to not only manage their exposure to risk, but to achieve greater operational efficiency, which is where Northern Ireland comes into its own. We should continue to put our emphasis on technology. Re-engineering excellence creates a high demand for highly skilled professionals, which we have in Northern Ireland. There are still opportunities for us in the financial services sector.

Mr Gallagher: Should there be new owners of the First Trust Bank, I thank the Minister for her commitment to seeking a meeting with them to

raise the issue of jobs. As she said, that comes against the backdrop of the situation at Quinn Insurance and the redeployment of staff from the Enniskillen planning office.

If she has a meeting with new owners of the First Trust Bank, I ask the Minister to take up the issue of services to rural communities. It is not just the banks in the large towns that are very important; throughout Fermanagh and Tyrone, many services are provided through local outlets of the First Trust Bank. I would like the Minister to raise that with any new owners of the bank.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am more than happy to raise that issue, because, like other banks, the First Trust Bank has retreated from rural areas. We had a useful debate earlier about the value of credit unions to communities, be they rural, urban or otherwise. In many cases, credit unions have taken up the slack in cases where banks have retreated to more urban centres. Therefore, I am more than happy to raise that issue with the First Trust Bank or its new owners, whoever they are.

Mr Neeson: I, too, recently met employees of the First Trust Bank who are deeply concerned about job losses if the sale goes through. Do the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Finance Minister have any plans to meet their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland to discuss the issue?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As I have already intimated, the decision for the Allied Irish Bank is a commercial one. Invest NI will continue to meet, and work with, the new buyer — whoever that may be — so that we can secure the jobs in Northern Ireland. When there is a change of ownership, there is always a fear that jobs will be lost, which I can understand. We want to ensure that those jobs are kept within the financial services sector in Northern Ireland.

Obviously, if there is a need to speak to our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, we will do so; however, it will be if there is a need to do so, and not just for the sake of it.

Mr McCallister: The Minister will be aware of realignments in the banking industry in Northern Ireland. Are further bank amalgamations in the best interests of customers, both savers and borrowers?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Whether I think that it is in the best interests of customers or not, one could say that it is not really up to me. If it happens, we will have to deal with whatever shape the banking sector takes. One of our difficulties when the recession took hold was that we had no indigenously owned bank in Northern Ireland; they were all owned by outside interests. That is a difficulty for us. When we seek to meet the people in the banks who matter, we sometimes have to go quite a distance to find them.

However, banking and the wider financial services sector certainly remains a critical sector for us with regard to services and employment possibilities. The banks continue to tell the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, the Finance Minister and me that they are open for business and ready to do business with any sector. However, the Member will know that the experience for a lot of people is very different, and there needs to be a meeting of minds on those issues.

Mr Speaker: Next on the list for a question is Peter Weir.

Mr Weir: Question 3.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Question 2, even. *[Laughter.]*

Foreign Direct Investment

2. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how her Department and the Department for Employment and Learning are working more closely together to encourage foreign direct investment.

(AQO 1189/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

On 25 January, I announced to the Assembly that my Department and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) would be working together to develop a model based on some of the principles adopted in North Carolina. The responsive education system in North Carolina was identified in the independent review of economic policy (IREP) report. A working group of officials from Invest Northern Ireland and DEL is looking at how those principles may apply to Northern Ireland.

Under the banner of assured skills, we hope to have in place a framework that will give potential investors the confidence that Northern

Ireland can satisfy their specific skills demands during the lifetime of the investment. That group will also look at how DEL and Invest NI work together more closely when engaging with companies that are interested in investing in Northern Ireland, to make sure that we present the most positive business solution.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her reply. What is the timescale for implementing the working group's model?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Obviously, how we work together will be an ongoing piece of work. A subgroup has been set up at ministerial level as a result of an IREP recommendation. That will form part of this work, because we want to see a more joined-up approach to investment, so that when people come to invest in Northern Ireland they can be assured that the appropriate skills are here and we can present an overall package to them. That has always been the key behind this piece of work.

Mr Beggs: Our closest competitor for foreign direct investment is the IDA in the Republic of Ireland. They say that their strengths are their talent, technology, tax regime and track record. Is the Minister satisfied that Northern Ireland's strengths are equally as strong to attract foreign direct investment? What weaknesses need to be addressed to ensure that additional jobs are created, real jobs that will be sustainable and stay here in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I doubt whether I have enough time to sell Northern Ireland in the way that I would like to sell Northern Ireland for the Member. However, the Member clearly has in the back of his mind the implications of a corporation tax cut for Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that a reduced rate of corporation tax could act as a significant incentive to help us to attract high-value-added foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland. That said, however, it must be recognised that any reduction in corporation tax would also need to be complemented with the supply of appropriate skills, and that is what we are concentrating on in our work with DEL. There also needs to be the telecommunications and roads infrastructure to attract foreign direct investment.

Obviously, too — and there has been much talk about this over the past couple of weeks — substantive costs are associated with

introducing a lower rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. It will not surprise the Member to know that that issue will come under the attention of the Executive subcommittee on the economy, and we will be discussing that at our first meeting, which we hope will take place later this month.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer, particularly what she said about working closely with DEL on the North Carolina model. Will she also outline what her Department, along with DEL, has done to implement the recent STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) review? As the Minister knows, the whole area of STEM subjects, and trying to create jobs linked to those subjects, is an important area for the economy.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Minister of Education sits on that subgroup, along with me and the Minister for Employment and Learning.

3.15 pm

The work on the STEM subjects will form part of the discussions on the new economic strategy for Northern Ireland. Invest Northern Ireland and DEL have also established formal collaborative groups and are working together to optimise resources in tightening times, to promote economic growth and to develop a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship. There is a great deal of interaction between Invest Northern Ireland and DEL. I thank the Minister for Employment and Learning for encouraging that interaction and for his strategy, which emphasises leadership. Local companies will need to develop those leadership skills when more foreign direct investment comes into Northern Ireland. I am sure that the House agrees with that.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Universities: Innovation

4. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning on linkages with Queen's University and the University of Ulster to translate innovation into businesses. (AQO 1191/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The successful commercialisation of R&D and

innovation by our academic institutions is a critical part of the Programme for Government's aim of increasing private sector productivity to enhance the wealth of Northern Ireland. Although I have had no direct discussions with my colleague on that specific issue, my Department and the Department for Employment and Learning work closely with the two universities and with businesses on a wide range of initiatives. Many of those initiatives are set out in the regional innovation strategy action plan and include, for example, the Northern Ireland Spin-Out fund, which supports start-up, early-stage businesses and university spin-outs in Northern Ireland and the work that is being done to implement the recommendations of MATRIX, which is the science industry panel.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her response. As she knows, we have some of the brightest students here in Northern Ireland. Only last month, a group of students from Queen's University came third in the UK final of an international competition for young entrepreneurs. Should there be a particular programme to help our young graduates to become entrepreneurs and turn their innovative ideas into reality?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

A large amount of money has been spent on encouraging our young graduates, particularly through the universities' spin-out programmes. One of our most successful companies, Andor Technology, which was a spin-out organisation, has recently been floated on the stock market and has been a huge success. We also have an innovation fund, of which the Member may or may not be aware. The Executive allocated almost £90 million to that fund for a three-year period that began in 2008. It is designed to encourage Northern Ireland businesses to spend more on research and development and innovation. One may ask how that is linked to our university graduates. The answer is that key projects supported by that fund sponsor 300 PhDs and studentships in areas of economic relevance. The Member is absolutely right about the calibre of our students, and we are concentrating on using the abilities of our brightest students to grow the economy of Northern Ireland.

Much more is happening, particularly as a result of the work of the MATRIX panel, which links university research to markets. We do not want just to become bogged down in academia, and we are focusing the research on markets, rather

than on technology, to determine the worth of that approach to the economy. I support the ongoing work because it is the key to the growth of our economy in the next 25 years.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister and urge her to do all in her power to move along opportunities for bright young graduates. My attention was drawn recently to the efforts of the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group to address the issue of corporation tax. It struck me that, perhaps, the Minister might be able to give us some information about that. We have talked before about an Ulster business school. Have there been any discussions about, or progress on, the joint establishment of such a school by the two universities? I was concerned that the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group was a voluntary body and that we needed something substantial and sustainable.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: We have not had any further discussions about that issue. I am happy to discuss the Member's ideas with him, because we did not follow up the matter after he last raised it with me. It would be helpful to do that in the near future.

Mr Gardiner: Has the Minister any specific plans to attract innovators in the green economy to set up operations for research, development, innovation and high-value manufacturing?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of our commercialisations, if you like, of research and development in the green energy area is QUESTOR. A huge amount of work has been carried out in relation to the green economy, not least by my own interdepartmental working group on energy, which is focusing one of its subgroups on jobs in the green economy. During the recent election campaign, a lot of Members raised the issue of the green economy being the way forward and the answer to finding jobs; I agree with that. A lot of good work is going on in Invest Northern Ireland and I am quite happy to share specifics of that with any Members if they so require it.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for that detailed response. Following on from the points that she already made, what specific measures or programmes have been put in place to encourage technology or knowledge transfer?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As I said, a range of measures and support programmes are directed at encouraging

greater linkages between businesses and the universities, not least because of the work that has been carried out by the MATRIX panel. I do not have time to list them all, but some examples are the knowledge transfer partnerships and the proof of concept schemes. Since 2002, through the knowledge transfer partnerships, Invest NI has contributed more than £10 million to 220 projects.

At a lower level, if you like, there is also the innovation voucher scheme. That is a very interesting scheme whereby companies can use their vouchers to buy-in university help for an idea that they may have for growth or innovation in their business. Some of the smallest companies in Northern Ireland have used that innovation voucher scheme to great success, and it just shows how little things can make such a big difference to small companies.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister detail the amount of money that her Department has spent on research and development in the further education sector?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Is that specifically for the education sector?

Mr P Maskey: Yes.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I will have to write to the Member about that because I do not have the specific details here.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Oil Prices

6. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any discussions her Department, or any of its agencies, has had with the major oil companies to ensure more transparency in their pricing system.

(AQO 1193/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Northern Ireland fuel prices respond to fluctuating wholesale prices that are set internationally and are outside the control of my Department. Additionally, fuel duty and tax, which accounts for around 62% of the final pump price of petrol, is set by Her Majesty's Treasury. Although my Department has not been in discussion with the major oil companies on their pricing systems, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland has called on oil companies operating in Northern

Ireland to provide consumers with the necessary price transparency so that they can decide whether they are paying a fair price for their heating oil. I strongly support that call.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her answer. Could the Minister use her influence to ensure that the rising cost of fuel does not affect any of our sectors, particularly the transport sector? If the cost of fuel continues to rise, it will have an impact on that sector, certainly through job losses.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I noted at the last North/South Ministerial Council meeting on transport that a North/South freight forum has been set up to look at a whole range of issues, including regulation. I am sure that that group will want to look at the issue of the price of fuel for hauliers. I accept that that is one of the issues that is really hampering the development of some of our companies, in so far as the amount of money that it takes to get their goods to places is increasing exponentially because of the cost of fuel. I recognise that and I am more than happy to work on that issue with either the Consumer Council or colleagues.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for outlining the issues about that particular matter. Could she give some more information on what her Department has been doing, particularly around the issue of fuel poverty, given the impact that all such matters, particularly the rise in fuel costs, have on many families on a day-to-day basis?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Member and the House are aware that, as economy Minister, my primary focus is on business competitiveness and that the Minister for Social Development leads on fuel poverty. However, we stand ready to assist in any way, particularly on energy consumption and energy efficiency measures. We give that much attention.

The Utility Regulator has undertaken a policy and option analysis on the implementation of social tariffs in Northern Ireland as a means of easing fuel poverty. Public consultation closed recently on a paper concerning assistance with affordability concerns for vulnerable energy consumers. However — I have made this point in the past — the impact of social tariff changes would need to be considered carefully and, indeed, receive political endorsement.

The rationale behind social tariffs is that those in fuel poverty pay less, but the cost of that is borne by the rest of the domestic customers and business customers. We know how much pressure some of our large energy users were under at the end of 2009 and at the beginning of 2010 because of their energy bills. Although it may look attractive to go down that road, we need to consider all the elements carefully before making any quick decision.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to the Consumer Council's report on road fuels, which was published in the past couple of days. Will she advise the House whether her Department or any of its agencies have undertaken any studies on different fuel pricing across Northern Ireland? I am thinking of fuels other than road fuels.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

If the Member is referring to home fuels, the Consumer Council has an oil price watch on its website. It checks oil suppliers' prices three times a week to find out the cheapest and then alerts people to where they can get the cheapest oil price. The oil industries in the UK and in the Republic of Ireland are unregulated. The reasons for that are the competitive nature of the industry and the fact that wholesale prices are set internationally and are, therefore, outside our scope in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, regulation would create additional costs for the consumer, which I want to avoid at this time. The Consumer Council will continue its good work, for which I commend it. However, no regulation will come into the market any time soon.

Dr Farry: Does the Minister agree that, in addition to considering prices, we must examine the energy efficiency of homes and businesses to combat the cost of heating oil? Does she also agree that we should consider the balance of our transport investment and increase investment in public transport in particular?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The second question is for another Minister, so I will steer clear of it.

I commend the work that the Carbon Trust does with the business community on energy efficiency. Some businesses have benefited greatly from the advice of the Carbon Trust. Indeed, I know of a Ballymena company that now knows the efficiency of each machine as it operates during the day. The Carbon Trust does a good job with the business community, and it is the business community that I am most

concerned about. More can always be done on energy efficiency. I encourage businesses to consider the option of renewable energy when they are seeking to change. Some businesses have done that because of high oil prices over the past while.

Mr Speaker: The Member who was due to ask question 7 is not in her place.

Invest NI: Agrifood

8. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what Invest NI is doing to capitalise on the strengths of the agrifood industry. (AQO 1195/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Since 2002, Invest Northern Ireland has offered almost £73 million of assistance to the Northern Ireland food and drink sector. In the past year alone, Invest NI leveraged total investment of more than £95 million in the sector, which created an additional £25 million of wages and salaries for our economy. Under arrangements that were agreed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in 2008, an interdepartmental group of senior officials from DETI, Invest Northern Ireland, DARD and DEL were tasked with liaising with an agrifood industry advisory panel. The food strategy that was developed as part of the process is a prime example of how we are capitalising on the strengths of the sector.

3.30 pm

Invest Northern Ireland continues to engage actively with the sector. In the past 18 months, one-to-one buying sessions have been held for local companies with all the biggest food retailers in the British Isles and Europe. More than 800 face to face meetings have been arranged in the past 12 months, and 80 local companies have achieved 275 product listings with multiples such as Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Asda. The new business achieved as a result totals £50 million, and that figure is growing.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for her reply. She has outlined how critical the agrifood industry is to the Northern Ireland economy, much of which is export driven. Will the Minister comment on a campaign launched recently by Bord Bia in the Irish Republic that seems to be

aimed at preventing Northern Ireland companies from doing business in that very important market?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The agrifood sector contributes 14% of manufacturing gross value added and 15.2% of our exported manufactured goods. That is why I am concerned about the campaign in the Republic of Ireland, particularly against our milk and poultry. I wrote today to Brendan Smith, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, about what I perceive as protectionism in the Republic of Ireland market. I am disappointed that the Republic has taken that action, which has ramifications for its access to the mainland market. The Government in the Republic must reconsider; if they close off the Republic's market to goods from Northern Ireland, there may well be consequences.

Mr P J Bradley: What level of exchange does the Minister have with her Executive colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on matters pertaining to the agrifood industry?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Together with the Agriculture Minister, I set up the industry panel in 2008 to look at the strategy for agrifood and to drive it forward. My officials have a particularly good working relationship with DARD officials in that area because of the importance of the agrifood sector. Not that long ago, people had written off that sector and said that it would not grow. However, during the recession, it has proven to be one of our strongest sectors.

I was delighted to be able to make a huge investment recently in Dale Farm. That was a sign of confidence in the future of the sector. I hope that the agrifood sector goes from strength to strength.

Mr Speaker: That concludes Question Time.

Adjourned at 3.32 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 May 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Sunbeds Bill: First Stage

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I beg to introduce the Sunbeds Bill [NIA 18/09], which is a Bill to make provision about the use or supply of tanning devices that use ultraviolet radiation; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Committee Business

Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 1 October 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill [NIA Bill 12/09].

I inform the House that it is unlikely that the Committee will require the entire duration of the extension period to consider the Bill. However, given the Committee's considerable workload, the extension until 1 October is being requested at this stage as a precautionary measure.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 1 October 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill [NIA Bill 12/09].

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report

Mr Speaker: This item on the Order Paper is a joint motion from the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. 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.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the report from the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group on the case for a reduced rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue, which is of great importance to the Assembly and our economy. In addition, I thank Ms Jennifer McCann, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, for agreeing to co-sponsor the debate. In due course, Ms McCann will make the winding-up speech on the motion. There has been good co-operation between the Committees on a number of related matters, for which I am also grateful to Ms McCann.

The Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group's report is important and timely. It is important that we open up debate on the issue, which has been skirted around for years. In 2006, the proposal to reduce corporation tax was a very lively issue, and there was considerable debate on the matter among politicians, economists and those interested in public affairs. It is a pity that, in 2007, the new Assembly did not deal with the issue more aggressively, perhaps by getting concessions from the British Government. However, that is history, and we are where we are. It is now time to discuss the issue.

As I said yesterday in the debate on credit unions, we are on the cusp of the formation of a new Government at Westminster. Therefore, it is timely for Northern Ireland parties to press important issues with any incoming Government, and the proposal to reduce corporation tax is one issue to which any new Government should give considerable consideration. The Assembly

should approach the issue seriously and in a concerted fashion.

That said, this is a take-note debate, and, although I personally favour a reduction in corporation tax, as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I think it is fair to say that the Committee has not taken a collective view on the matter. Nevertheless, I detect strong support within the Committee for a reduction in corporation tax. I place the matter in that context because I am not trying to tie the Committee to a particular view, although it is sympathetic to the proposal.

I welcome the Economic Reform Group's report, which is well researched. Everyone should read it thoroughly, because it is based on expert examination and analysis of the issue. As part of the UK, Northern Ireland is in a unique position, because it has a land border with another EU member state — the Irish Republic. Therefore, in the UK context, there is a strong argument that Northern Ireland is a special case, which, in effect, is what the report says. The Irish Republic has a very low rate of corporation tax, which has enabled it to develop its economy in a way that we have not been able to. Therein lies a lesson.

The report makes the case that Northern Ireland has the lowest average wages and productivity. That chimes with the Barnett report, which outlined the state of our economy and its productivity. Government support for business is higher here than in any other UK region, and traditional economic development policy will not turn Northern Ireland into a self-sufficient economy. Despite a generous subsidy and state support for business here, the economy has not made that turn. The step change towards which we must all work has not taken place.

It is important to note that the European Union will begin to reduce ceilings for state aid and may not permit it at all after 2013. The report states:

"forecasts are that future job growth may well be under half that of recent decades."

It also points out that public expenditure in Northern Ireland,

"is equivalent to 74% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)"

and that the British taxpayer subsidises Northern Ireland to the tune of £9 billion

annually. The report further makes the case that, in future, the Northern Ireland private sector needs to be strengthened to achieve a more “balanced economy”. It points out that:

“Without radical change it seems inevitable that NI will remain the UK’s poorest region”.

It states that EU subsidies were “of minimal importance” in the success of the Republic of Ireland’s economy and that reduction in corporation tax is:

“The only policy ... that can dramatically accelerate economic growth over a short timescale ... The Republic of Ireland has shown that this works, and many other small nations are now following Ireland’s lead.”

That contains an important lesson for us all. How can Invest NI incentivise profitable firms to invest here, where corporation tax is at 28%, when just a few miles down the road those same companies can avail themselves of corporation tax at less than half that — 12.5%? That is a stark question for any potential investor coming to Northern Ireland and one with which we must grapple.

The theory is that reduced corporation tax will lead to increased investment by companies, which will lead to a growth in the number of better-paid jobs. That will in turn result in more revenue from income tax and VAT, less unemployment and decreased dependency on benefits. It is clear that real, tangible incentives have to be offered to companies, and the report suggests that a reduction in corporation tax is essential. It is important to note that we can do this within the context of EU law. In the light of the Azores case, we can create the situation that would allow the transfer of tax-varying powers in relation to corporation tax. It is taken for granted that that decision would have to be ratified by the European authorities; however, we could then address the issue of how we repay that tax reduction to, in essence, the central Exchequer. That is a big question and one that I am certain many Members will ask.

The report has identified approximately £200 million to be repaid to the Exchequer — a fairly significant amount of money. Nonetheless, the net benefit over subsequent years would be such that the report envisages we could make up for that. Of all the issues to be addressed, repayment is the thorniest, but there are ways and means of getting round it. We should

tackle that issue head-on. If we look at it, deal with it and debate it, we can achieve an acceptable outcome. The prize is to reinvent and restructure our economy to ensure that it is fit for the twenty-first century and that it will provide more and better jobs and transform the way we live. In conclusion, I ask the House to support the motion.

10.45 am

Mr Hamilton: I support the motion, and I do so in a rare glimpse of harmony in the Chamber. That harmony has come about as a result of the many reasons that the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment put forward— *[Interruption.]* Yes, indeed, a rare glimpse. I may do my best to eradicate that in the next few minutes.

We all share the goal of wanting our economy to develop, grow and improve. Sometimes, there are divergences of view on how that objective can best be achieved, but, in the past, seeking a reduction in Northern Ireland’s rate of corporation tax has united parties, and it should continue to do so in the House. There are several reasons why we are united on the issue, not least those touched on by the Committee Chairperson. Significantly, among those reasons is the argument about the size of Northern Ireland’s public sector, which was raised, foolishly perhaps, by some during the election campaign. In raising that issue, others quickly realised that it was not to do with the size of our public sector but the size of our private sector.

We do not need to concentrate on reducing the size of our public sector per se but on increasing the size of our private sector. We cannot reduce the public sector and expect the private sector to grow automatically and fill that gap. The private sector needs a kick-start to grow to the levels to which we want it to grow so that it can sustain the economy much better than it currently does. There are few better ways to do that than the primer of a reduction in corporation tax.

Why do we say that we want to reduce corporation tax? It is not to give companies the benefit of a lower tax burden; it is about the benefit to everyone in Northern Ireland. Our economy would grow, the wages for those employed in the private sector would increase, and, thus, the standard of living in Northern Ireland would rise. If companies are attracted to Northern Ireland, not only will it make Northern

Ireland a better place in which to invest but it will make it a better place to visit. Above all, we do not want to sit here in Northern Ireland as the sick man in the United Kingdom and continue to take ever-increasing subventions. The harsh reality is that most regions of the United Kingdom depend on subventions, but everyone in Northern Ireland should have the shared goal of making more of a contribution, paying more of their way and better bridging the gap in productivity between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Our primary focus for a reduction in corporation tax should be to grow a dynamic, vibrant, high tech-focused economy that would benefit everybody in Northern Ireland. Although we do not want to continue as a case that is always seeking special treatment, there is a special case in Northern Ireland, as was mentioned by the Committee Chairperson. We are the only part of the United Kingdom that has a land border with another EU state with a much lower rate of corporation tax than Northern Ireland companies face. The Committee Chairperson made the point that a company a few miles over the border can benefit from a 12.5% rate of corporation tax, but, if it were up here, it would have to pay much more. Many of the skilled people whom we are creating in Northern Ireland's workforce are going across the border and benefiting the exchequer down there.

Northern Ireland is so far behind other regions of the United Kingdom because of what it has had to endure over the past 30 to 40 years. Previous measures did not achieve the goal and did not close the gap, so we need to do something radically different. People in Northern Ireland can do and will continue to do what we have previously done. We achieved some success in doing what we can do with the levers that are in our control. We can improve our education system, enhance the skills base in our country, improve our infrastructure to make it world-class and control business costs where we can do that. However, by continuing to do that, we will not make the necessary step change in our economy. We need that big change, and we need to reduce corporation tax. It will not be easily achieved, and it will not be without consequence.

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

Mr Hamilton: The House should unite on trying to achieve that goal, which will radically improve our economy.

Mr Speaker: I call Ms Jennifer McCann.

Ms J McCann: I am making the winding-up speech on the debate, so I think that other Members may wish to speak first.

Mr Speaker: I call Mitchel McLaughlin.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): He is still writing his speech.

Mr McLaughlin: I am still writing my speech. I, too, support the motion. It is useful to refer to the period before restoration of this institution when there was all-party agreement on the need to rebalance the economy and to adopt measures such as a more competitive corporation tax regime as the absolutely essential means of achieving that.

An all-party delegation met Mr Brown in his then role as Chancellor and again in his role as Prime Minister. That delegation and the negotiations achieved certain assurances on funding arrangements, especially on the strategic investment fund, over a number of years. Nevertheless, the only response that we got on the corporation tax argument was that we would get the Varney review. However, to no one's particular surprise, it effectively supported the Treasury position, which was to maintain the status quo on arrangements such as tax-varying powers or corporation tax, which, in effect, is a tax-varying arrangement.

The Economic Reform Group took on Varney's arguments, and that is important for a number of reasons, particularly because it has taken the Treasury's arguments as represented by Varney, challenged them in a systemic and robust fashion and addressed each of the arguments that Varney, on behalf of the Treasury, had advanced in his reports. Varney relied on data directly drawn from the Treasury, and those data and statistics provided unintended opportunities. It is important to record our appreciation and thanks for the work done by the Economic Reform Group, which was led by Sir George Quigley, Mike Smyth and their team of fellow economists, because they have done us all, and particularly this Assembly, proud.

The Member who spoke previously addressed the fact that early progress was made in establishing common ground between the

parties on the need to rebalance the economy. Indeed, I must acknowledge that the mover of the motion also referred to that. If anything, that common ground has been strengthened. Clearly, the global economic implications of the downturn have directly impacted on that number one priority, but the question remains whether we ever had the tools to achieve that objective. It was the correct objective to rebalance the economy and grow the private sector to its legitimate and intended role and function in the economy, but not if the cost is downsizing or taking any kind of punitive approach to the public sector. The question of whether we have the tools is something that the Assembly must now begin to address. The alternative is that we simply preside over a cake that diminishes each time the Westminster authorities decide to impose cuts. We have already been through that experience twice in the Budget period, and that is quite sufficient.

Our starting position was that the block grant was inadequate because it was not calculated on the basis of need. The situation has worsened, and the pressures that are beginning to emerge in our public sector mean that the issue must be addressed as a matter of urgency. I strongly endorse the proposal —

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

Mr McLaughlin: However, it must lead towards an action programme. I urge all parties to come together to develop the proposal and address the matter with the Treasury on an all-party basis. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Cree: I thank the Chairpersons of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for jointly tabling the motion. The motion must be placed in the context of the ongoing economic and debt problems in the euro zone, particularly in Greece. Given the increasingly volatile markets and the emergency measures worth £430 billion that have been agreed by EU Finance Ministers, the potential ramifications of not reducing the UK's national debt are extremely high. To avoid further economic and monetary difficulties, we must reduce government spending and make government more efficient. That means that Northern Ireland will have a reduction in the block grant in this financial year or the next. We cannot escape from that fact.

The Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group's report indicates that the UK has an unbalanced economy, and it is, therefore, evident that Northern Ireland must grow its private sector. That fact is agreed by every party in the Assembly, and, in a changed fiscal climate, the need to grow our private sector will become even greater. As the report suggests, from next year, we will also contend with EU regulations reducing the maximum amount of grant aid that Invest Northern Ireland can give to private firms, thus shifting one of the basic cornerstones of our economic policy.

I recognise that the review of Invest Northern Ireland is attempting to address some of those issues and that we must also have a full range of measures to support all businesses in Northern Ireland, especially those which are small and medium-sized. However, I can understand the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group's report when it states that:

"The only policy we know of that can dramatically accelerate economic growth over a short timescale is a reduction in corporation tax."

The fact that an annual allocation of £150 million worth of grants has not managed to raise GDP per capita here much above 80% of the UK average illustrates clearly that point.

If the power to reduce corporation tax is devolved to Northern Ireland, the Executive will have a difficult decision to make. As the report highlights, the Azores ruling means that the Executive would have to bear the full fiscal consequences of introducing their own tax rate and would not be compensated by national authorities for a loss of tax revenue. The Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group suggests that the cost to the Executive could be as much as £200 million if we were to bring corporation tax into line with the Republic of Ireland's rate of 12.5%, which, in reality, is the genuinely competitive level. However, that must be balanced with the potential of reaching a break-even point after only six years, after which the block grant would be subsidised by corporation tax revenue. The Treasury would also be content, as the difference between tax take and public spending in Northern Ireland would be reduced. We must also remember that the Republic of Ireland never suffered a loss in revenue, due, in many circumstances, to a reduction in tax evasion.

We must never forget the real reason why a reduction in corporation tax would be beneficial to Northern Ireland. At the last count, some 53,000 people were recorded as unemployed here, and those are individuals and families who have been hit by the current recession as well as the long-term unemployed. We owe it to the people of Northern Ireland to do all that we can to give them every economic opportunity in the future.

The Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group calculates that a reduction in corporation tax could create an extra 2,100 high value-added jobs per annum in Northern Ireland, with knock-on employment in the wider economy. Although I recognise that there are concerns about current levels of FDI and that we must further examine the issue of company displacement and ensure that we have a raft of policies to help both FDI and small and medium-sized businesses, we cannot lose sight of the prize of creating new jobs. We have an extremely well-educated population and an improving infrastructure, but we must be able to attract the investment that will create the outward-looking, exporting economy that all Members want.

11.00 am

Mr Neeson: I welcome the debate. Once again, it shows the co-operation between the two Committees. Alasdair McDonnell and I attended the launch of the report on 10 February 2010, and I am pleased to say that corporation tax is back on the political agenda. It was a major issue during the recent election campaign and featured in many parties' manifestos.

The report was carried out by the Economic Reform Group, which involves the most respected economists, accountants and businessmen in Northern Ireland. The report puts the economy at the top of the political agenda, and it must be considered in tandem with the recent report by Professor Richard Barnett. It used a tax model of the Northern Ireland economy to estimate the impact of the reduced rate.

There are some key points to note: the model was based on one that was developed by the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) and which was updated by the regional forecasts, and the estimates for additional investment are based on new evidence on the flow of inward investment into small countries with differing rates of corporation tax. That model shows that all small countries with

low rates of tax attract large numbers of new companies. The model calculates the impact of low tax on existing companies and the impact of overall tax revenues, including the revenue lost due to the reduction in tax and the revenue gained due to high levels of economic activity. According to the report, total tax revenues fall initially, but, subsequently, they build up rapidly, with break-even point coming after six years.

The report must also be considered in conjunction with the Varney report, which the Assembly debated previously. The Economic Reform Group report destroys many of the arguments that Varney put forward. One of the key benefits that the report outlines is that Northern Ireland would have a much larger private sector, including 90,000 extra jobs over 20 years. Many of those jobs would have salary levels that were well above the average for Northern Ireland, and unemployment should fall much further than would otherwise be the case. The report brings into consideration the argument about Northern Ireland's overdependence on the public sector. That is a big issue to be considered. During the present political stalemate, that issue must be brought to the fore by elected politicians in Northern Ireland.

Part of the report states that public spending in Northern Ireland should be reduced by about £200 million a year. Although that sounds large, it is only 2.5% of spending on public services, and it is less than the average underspend in recent years. The experience of the Republic of Ireland in reducing corporation tax rates in the past decade was that there was no reduction in revenue.

One of the key implications of the reduction in corporation tax is that the Assembly should have tax-varying powers. I have argued for such powers in the Assembly since 1998. I argued for them in the negotiations that took place between 1996 and 1998, and I do not accept the arguments of pessimists that they would affect the subvention from the Barnett formula. Realistically, Wales is going along the same lines —

Mr Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Neeson: The Welsh Assembly Government argue that they should have tax-varying powers.

Mr Simpson: I will be brief. I welcome ERG's report on the case for a reduction in the rate of corporation tax in the Province. If nothing else,

the report has generated some fresh interest in the matter, and I am glad that we are having this debate today.

As a committed unionist, I want to see our nation making its way out of the current economic recession as quickly as possible, and I want to ensure that Northern Ireland plays its full part in that. My party manifesto addresses that vital area, and it rightly suggests that the growth of the private sector is key to economic success. The manifesto draws attention to the UK's high level of corporation tax, which can range from 21% to 28%, depending on the level of profits, and states that it:

"should be substantially reduced to kick-start economic growth."

It is a complex subject, and many obstacles will need to be considered. However, a strong case can be put forward for a reduction in corporation tax in Northern Ireland, not to line the pockets of business executives, but to help to attract the high quality inward investment that is much needed. Such a reduction is not, and never has been, a silver bullet, but it would provide us with a useful additional lever. Let us face it: there are few economic and financial levers available to the Executive and the Assembly.

Our economic and financial difficulties are also more acute than those in the rest of the country. As the report indicates, unless something radical is done, Northern Ireland will remain the UK's poorest region. Unlike the rest of the UK, we have suffered from more than three decades of terrorism, during which the heart of our economy was ripped to shreds. Unlike the rest of the UK, we share a land border with another EU state in which, as we all know, the rate of corporation tax stands at 12.5%. A reduction in corporation tax to that level would be a considerable help in our efforts to regenerate our wealth-creating manufacturing base.

I realise that some will regard such an arrangement as highly political. After all, it would knock Northern Ireland out of kilter with the rest of the UK and harmonise it with the Irish Republic. If nothing else, that could be a temporary arrangement. If we cannot achieve an indefinite reduction, a temporary one over several years would help to kick-start the whole economy. If it helps to generate employment, attract investment and encourage wealth creation, surely it is worth trying.

It is not a new issue. Sir David Varney examined the matter in 2007, when he rejected a reduction on a number of grounds, one being that the block grant would have to be cut. Any such cut remains totally unacceptable, and it would defeat the whole purpose of the exercise. There may be obstacles, and I suspect that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will draw our attention to some of them. Nevertheless, where there is a will, there is a way. The ERG report has provoked a fresh debate, which can only be good. I support the motion.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Those who contribute to today's debate will probably welcome the Economic Reform Group's report unanimously. The group appeared before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and most Committee members felt that its report made sense. It is now 10 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, and although we have relative political stability in the institutions in the North of Ireland, the focus must now turn to economic development and prosperity.

Yet here, as a region of Britain, wage levels and productivity levels have remained relatively low. Despite high levels of grant assistance to businesses, we still do not have levels of productivity that come anywhere near what is defined as being prosperous in comparison with the South of Ireland and the rest of Britain.

Other Members have gone over the details of the report and how a reduction in the level of corporation tax will impact. I know that some unionists have concerns about how it will affect the block grant, but through considering the attempts to form a Government in Britain over the past couple of days and the debate about cuts and the way in which we are so dependent on the block grant that we get from the British Government, it becomes clear that having some sort of control over policy on corporation tax would give us control over developing the economy, particularly the private sector.

Other areas need to be considered on an all-Ireland basis, not just in regard to corporation tax. VAT rates, for example, create an impediment to people doing business on both sides of the border. An all-Ireland study was carried out on the economies of both jurisdictions a number of years ago. Some of the ideas arising from that included trying to co-operate on all-Ireland skills, the road

infrastructure, education and research and development. That would bring prosperity to everyone in the North and the South, no matter what our political differences are. Therefore, it makes sense to co-operate. It does not make sense to have two different levels of corporation tax on the island of Ireland.

We have the political will to implement the change in corporation tax here in the North in the time ahead, and we will see how the Executive push the issue forward with the British Government to try to get it implemented. Overall, that is where we are on this issue, and we are united in wanting to see the private sector growing — though not at the expense of the public sector — and more prosperity, particularly for productivity levels and higher paid jobs.

Mr Campbell: I also welcome the take-note debate, which provides an opportunity for each of us to spell out our views in broad terms. Many people have spoken of the advantages that Northern Ireland could gain from a reduction in corporation tax. There are a number of problems, and Sean Neeson outlined one or two of them, albeit from a slightly different perspective from my own. It is not a one-way street. There is a cost implication attached to it.

I welcome the report and think that we should do significant further research on the issue, but it appears to be the case that around £200 million per annum will either have to be found or reduced from the block grant over a period of five or six years before we begin to see the benefits that will undoubtedly flow, as appears to be the case in the Irish Republic. That effectively means that, at a time when economic stringencies are most acute, we will have to find approximately £1 billion over the next five or six years to pay for the jam that will come tomorrow. That is not in any way to diminish the concept, which has significant value, but we need to be clear about the implications.

We have also just heard some of the political implications. It is very clear that there are those who want to see a corporation tax of 12.5 % because it would harmonise with the Irish Republic. For that reason, I would prefer to see a 10% tax, which would make us more competitive than the Irish Republic, or something similar. We are, and must be, aware of those who are trying to make this an economic argument that is carefully attached to

a political argument. We must be very careful about that, and I urge caution for that reason.

11.15 am

We must try to ensure that we produce prosperity. A number of Members, including Mr Neeson, mentioned the political uncertainty that exists at the moment. One thing is certain: whatever Government emerges either today, tomorrow or whenever — the Government that may be comprised over the next day or two is not a Government of Britain, it is a Government of the United Kingdom — there will still be some economic realities that we cannot run away from.

One such reality, which has been the case for generations, is that the United Kingdom's economic powerhouse is based around the south-east of England. That is a fact that we cannot ignore, and it is one that causes resentment not only in Northern Ireland but in the north-east of England, the north-west of England, and in Scotland and Wales. Whatever the composition of the Government that is about to emerge, the time is coming for those of us who represent those regions and who see the south-east of England as a powerhouse that sucks in a wealth of industry, job creation and IT resources to address that issue. All that economic prosperity has been concentrated in a very small part of the United Kingdom to the detriment of many regions across the rest of the UK. The MPs who represent all those regions ought to be able to work much more closely to ensure that the economic prosperity that exists, and that will exist in the UK over coming years, is more evenly spread and that Northern Ireland gets its fair share. We must try to ensure that there is a more properly balanced economy throughout a nation of 60 million people. If we do that, we will be doing a service for everybody in the United Kingdom but particularly those in Northern Ireland, who want us to take advantage of whatever situation emerges for the greater good for all the people here.

Mr McNarry: The prospect of a minority Government, a two-party coalition or a rainbow multi-party gathering is waiting to be settled in London today. Somewhere over the rainbow, Sinn Féin's president has circulated a message calling for a united approach on the economy here. In my mind, that is a bit rich and hypocritical, given that his party is abstaining from the national Parliament in its hour of need. Nevertheless, let us not lose sight of the impact

and importance of the motion. It is all the more important that the House supports it today.

There is a great deal to commend in the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group's case for a reduced rate of corporation tax, which has taken forward this debate and others on such a reduction here. One of its most important features is the realism that it introduces into what has hitherto been little more than an emotive headline-grabbing mantra. The report puts the introduction of a reduced corporation tax in Northern Ireland firmly in the hard-fact context of European Union competition rules, Treasury clawbacks and the need for economic policy delivery by the Northern Ireland Assembly. The report also brings to the fore the urgency of the need to address the issue, given that EU state aid rules may prevent Northern Ireland from offering grant-based attractions or inward investment from 2013 onwards.

Ceilings on those types of investment grants and government subsidies will begin to reduce from 2011 and may stand at zero by 2013. Oxford Economics has computed that the potential number of jobs generated from such methods would reduce from 13,000 a year at present to between 5,000 and 7,000 a year by 2015. Therefore, reform of corporation tax is not a theoretical discussion in the House; it is one of urgent necessity.

My party has made the reduction of corporation tax a central part of its economic strategy and has proposed the creation of a Northern Ireland-wide enterprise zone. The fundamental issue behind both those policies is the need to incentivise and to grow the Northern Ireland private sector. That cannot happen overnight. Indeed, we see it happening over a 20-year transition period, especially given the current international and global economic climate. Reconfiguring our economy to a private enterprise base would create the additional benefits of increasing the tax take, from increased employment in the private sector and from company taxation; reducing welfare and, therefore, benefit dependency; and creating a more diverse and employable labour market.

The reduction of corporation tax is a business-driven solution that is based on how business really works and thinks and on the psychology of entrepreneurs. It would be part of providing an enabling framework so that people could grow new businesses, which would, in turn,

provide new and much needed employment opportunities for people here. However, it is not the only element in creating a business-friendly environment that will encourage an enterprise-driven, private sector, job-creating climate. There are other important building blocks. For example, the creative industry sector, which we fully support.

We also need to develop a new, enabling culture in the government machine, rather than the risk-averse gatekeeper culture that exists at present. We must reduce red tape and incentivise our small and medium-sized businesses to grow and to expand into new markets. While recognising that we must reduce the national debt, we must identify that Northern Ireland has been historically underfunded. All Members must be prepared for potential changes to the Barnett formula. We must protect what we have but also be equipped to make an effective case for Northern Ireland's needs.

I support the motion and commend it to the House. I commend also the need for new realism and urgency in this important matter.

Mr O'Loan: I welcome this take-note debate. However, implicit in taking note of the report is support for its principle that a reduction in corporation tax would be a desirable measure to attract greatly increased levels of foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland. I very much support that principle.

The Economic Reform Group deserves to be taken very seriously. The group of seven consists of economists, taxation experts and business specialists who are well known to us and have standing and authority in these matters. Therefore, the report deserves to be taken very seriously. It presents a very carefully worked argument set in the context of a new approach to regional policy. Essentially, the report says that current regional policy has failed. It sets out, as many others have done, that under the Azores judgement, there is no insurmountable barrier to a reduction in corporation tax here. Indeed, the Azores judgement is beneficial, because it sets out the terms in which a region of an EU member state can have a differential rate of income tax.

In December 2007, the report of the first Varney review elaborated, in 120 pages, what it had probably already concluded before a line was written: Northern Ireland should not have a reduced rate of corporation tax. However, even

that report points out clearly that there is no insurmountable obstacle to the introduction of a lower rate of corporation tax here. I understand that Gibraltar and the Basque region have availed themselves of that option, as defined in the Azores judgement. I believe that that measure would work for Northern Ireland.

It is worth noting that despite the very serious fiscal pressures on it, which have required very substantial tax increases and spending cuts, the Republic of Ireland has made the deliberate choice to protect its lower rate of corporation tax, because it knows the long-term importance of that measure to its economy. In 2007, Northern Ireland obtained \$1 billion of foreign direct investment. In the same year, the Republic of Ireland attracted \$27 billion.

The Finance Minister, whom I welcome to the debate, has expressed concerns about the cost of the measure to the Northern Ireland block. A figure of £200 million has been quoted, and I would be interested to know whether the Minister can quote the actual contribution in corporation tax from Northern Ireland given the present state of our economy. That would be a useful figure.

I do not want to play any party political games on the issue. It is too serious for that. The Minister makes a serious point: there is a cost to be borne. However, that is not an overwhelming point. There will be a cost, which I understand to be obligatory under the Azores ruling and which would be particularly difficult at a time of financial stringency. The report does not ignore that point. When the report's authors came before the Finance Committee, they were perfectly prepared to elaborate on how that issue would be addressed.

The key argument is that the policy will pay for itself in a remarkably short time by increasing the corporation tax base and greatly increasing contributions from other taxes, such as income tax and VAT. It will also reduce benefits by reducing unemployment and reducing the number of people who are economically inactive.

Mr McLaughlin: I have a fairly straightforward query. Does the Member agree that if we had the opportunity to reduce the level of corporation tax, reducing it to 10% — as suggested by the DUP spokesperson Gregory Campbell — would have consequences for the payback period and the immediate financial impact?

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

Mr O'Loan: As we know, the authors of the report are not specific on the level at which corporation tax should be set. That is a matter for intense discussion, debate and analysis among ourselves as we proceed. With regard to the hit to our block grant, we have the option, which I think we would use, to phase in a reduction in corporation tax. We are the authors of how we would implement the measure.

The Varney report referred to the fears of effects on other parts of the UK; artificial shifts in company finances, which could be dealt with; and the demand for an equivalent measure in other regions, particularly Scotland. Scotland is very different from Northern Ireland. Recent figures showed that we have three stock-market-quoted companies, whereas Scotland has 160 or 170. It is far from obvious that Scotland would want to avail itself of the same measure, because the cost to its economy would be much greater.

This is not the only measure needed to improve our economy. We have other things to do as well. I have often wondered why we have no spontaneous growth when we have such good companies, but in small quantity.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr O'Loan: This is the single measure that will create the critical mass that we need for our economy to take off.

Mr Moutray: Like others today, I welcome the report from the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group on the case for a reduced rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. The report is timely, and I am glad that it has at least engendered further debate on the issue, given the financial strain that corporation tax is placing on local businesses. Indeed, it deters and discourages potential growth in the UK, which has a particularly negative impact on Northern Ireland.

My party has been vocal about the need for a reduction in corporation tax in Northern Ireland. Our Enterprise and Finance Ministers lobbied hard on the issue when devolution was restored three years ago, which was when Sir David Varney conducted his investigation into the matter.

My party's recent election manifesto clearly states that we want to see an achievable scheme to reduce corporation tax in Northern Ireland. It is broadly accepted by the House that we need to become much more competitive internationally and that we need to encourage businesses. A reduction in corporation tax would assist greatly.

It goes without saying that the UK as a whole suffers from high levels of corporation tax and regulation. It is my belief, and that of my party, that that should be substantially reduced, particularly in Northern Ireland, to kick-start economic growth.

11.30 am

We have a strong case for a reduction in corporation tax that is specific to Northern Ireland, because we are the only part of the UK that has a land border with another EU state. Ultimately, that acts as a restraint and is often a key determining factor in whether businesses locate here. Northern Ireland warrants special treatment, not only because of the land border, but because of the economic problems that we endured over the past 40 years of the Troubles. Moreover, we are emerging from an economic recession.

It has been said that such a reduction in corporation tax could mean hundreds of millions of pounds being slashed from Government spending and given to business executives. That would simply not be acceptable. My party has made clear its proposal to cut corporation tax. However, we must ensure that that does not involve a compensating reduction in the block grant.

I am under no illusions, and I know that achieving a reduction will not be easy. I am sure that the Finance Minister will refer to that later. However, it is vital that the whole House, along with our newly elected MPs, lobby as one on the matter. Although a reduction of corporation tax would be beneficial, particularly in attracting international investment, it would not fully solve the economic problems that we and many other countries are experiencing. However, it would award us some economic leverage over our counterparts.

For the reasons that I outlined, a strong argument can be made for a temporary cut. The potential benefits of even a temporary measure would be long lasting and significant, and we

must look beyond the short term. The prize could be the growth of local businesses and top international inward investment, with all the benefits to society that would flow from that.

A potential cut in the rate of corporation tax has been a recurring theme since David Varney's involvement some three years ago. I welcome the fact that it is back on the table; the time is right to negotiate and lobby for such a change. Our Executive, and particularly the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, are doing sterling work to declare Northern Ireland open for business. Such a reduction, even on a temporary basis, would provide Northern Ireland with extra leverage and a competitive advantage. I support the motion.

Dr McDonnell: I warmly welcome the report from the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group, some of whose members are in the Public Gallery today. I am glad that they are with us for the debate, because I want to thank them for the amount of time and energy that they committed to bringing the report before us.

The report is invaluable, because it triggers and has triggered much discussion, not only on corporation tax but on what we should do about the economy. Today's debate is about supporting the broad principle rather than dissecting the detail, much of which other Members made useful mention. I am heartened that all Members who spoke, from all sides of the Chamber, were broadly in support of that principle.

The biggest challenge that faces the Assembly and Executive is how we pump-prime the economy and ensure that we build a robust, wealth-creating private sector. If we face that challenge, we will be recognised politically as having been successful. If not, we will be perceived to have failed our public politically. A decision to reduce corporation tax does not imply that such a reduction must be introduced in a single shock wave. It can be phased in sensitively and in a controlled way.

A reduction would have knock-on effects on other aspects of the Budget. On the positive side, however, it would create hope and, economically speaking, provide light at the end of the tunnel. Our unique circumstances mean that we would have to forgo only a small amount of tax loss as a result of the change, because our current tax base with regard to corporation tax is small. The great benefit that would flow

from a reduction would not be limited to the tax implications. A reduction would send out a loud and clear message to the business community and to the global economy that Northern Ireland is open for and means business. The message would be that the Assembly means business and intends to get to grips with creating a more robust private sector.

As I said, others have already made many of the key points, and I will not waste time repeating them. However, a decision to reduce corporation tax here would be the starting gun for a major economic revival, particularly in the private sector. It would send a loud and clear signal to the private sector here that the parties in this Assembly are pro-business and intent on supporting a private sector that creates wealth, jobs and taxes to support our social programme.

Many things have been said, but I want to highlight some issues. It has been suggested that we could create 90,000 extra jobs over 20 years. That would represent a massive job creation programme. A little bit of that would be very welcome in Fermanagh at the moment. Significantly, we could reduce unemployment over that period. In the longer term, we could generate substantial tax income because even though we might forego a small amount of corporation tax, we would be generating extra income tax, extra national insurance contributions and extra VAT. We could reduce our dependency on the block grant by over £1 billion within 20 years. We could even reduce public spending by £200 million, or 2.5% per annum of our block grant.

I feel that this is a golden opportunity. The Treasury fudged it last time and had Mr Varney kill it off with a degree of kindness. We have to get our teeth into the corporation tax issue now. We have to make it work, and we have to create a united front in the Assembly to tackle it. It is the tip of an iceberg, and, as I said earlier, tackling it means that we are open for business and open to do all sorts of things.

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

Dr McDonnell: I urge colleagues to support the motion.

Dr Farry: I support the motion. It must be recognised that the economy across the United Kingdom is unbalanced. Only three of the 12

recognised UK regions are net contributors to the Treasury, and of the other nine, Northern Ireland is the most dependent on the fiscal transfers of the subvention. That is a form of market failure, and the situation is much more acute than is the case for many of our international competitors. Having an unbalanced economy has consequences for the UK, in the form of increased living costs and traffic congestion in the south-east and lack of opportunities in the other regions.

Northern Ireland's situation is the most critical of the nine dependent regions. We have a land border with the Republic of Ireland, which puts us in a particular competitive situation with it, given the nature of investment that we are able to attract to our economy. We welcome the investment that there has been in Northern Ireland over the past decades, which has provided crucial employment for many people. Equally, we must be straight with ourselves. The nature of that investment has been different than that which went to the Republic of Ireland. Our investment has been in lower-productivity ventures and has resulted in lower wages than the norm. By contrast, many well-regarded international brands have gone into the Republic of Ireland, such as Intel and Google, which are at the cutting edge of the new economy of the twenty-first century.

A lot of good economic policy is being conducted in Northern Ireland, and there is no doubt that the Executive have continued to make that their top priority. Although we may quibble about its details, that policy will, to a certain extent, make a difference to people's lives. However, we must be frank. Despite the good work that has been done over the past number of years by the predecessor regimes in Northern Ireland, we have not seen any convergence of the productivity gap across the UK.

Our productivity level has stuck stubbornly at around 80%. Sir David Varney recognised in his report that that situation is not likely to change, even if his recommendations are followed. That reflects the underlying complacency in the Treasury, which seems to accept and justify having an unbalanced UK economy. Given the arguments that I have made so far and the costs for the UK as a whole, I do not believe that that situation is justifiable: it is out of step with what is happening elsewhere.

It is right to focus on corporation tax as being the area where the potential exists to make a step change in our economy. We must move from a low-productivity, low-wage type of inward investment to a different type that focuses on higher-paid jobs and higher productivity. By doing that, Northern Ireland could stand on its own two feet. I do not want future generations to be continually dependent on fiscal transfer from the UK Treasury. It is important that we stand on our own two feet and that we are able to retain our young people by offering that type of job.

The challenge will be how to pay for that. I accept the implications of the Azores ruling, which means that the money will have to come out of the Northern Ireland block grant. Equally, we must recognise that we in Northern Ireland are already making decisions that are different from those in the rest of the UK; for example, the decision to defer water charges. That cost is not covered by the block grant, but we have made a choice to fund it locally. That creates a distortion, as would a lower rate of corporation tax. However, I believe that a move to lower the rate of corporation tax would be justifiable because of the wider economic benefits that would accrue.

We must also look at what will happen with state aid. As that winds down, the way that we invest money through Invest NI will have to be reviewed. Some resources may be freed up that could be better deployed in covering a lower rate of corporation tax. I am concerned that the DUP states that this may be a short-term measure. It must be for the long term.

Mr Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Dr Farry: If we are trying to attract international investors, we must realise that they will want the certainty of a long period of investment, not something that benefits them for two or three years.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I thank Members who have taken part in this worthwhile debate for doing so. There is fairly wide political consensus on the issue, although there are variations in each party's statement. Some, such as Mr Farry and Mr Cree, have accepted that there will be costs. Mr Farry suggested where the money to cover those costs may be found. However, the Ulster Unionist Party has not indicated where the money could be found, while others say that it should be a costless exercise. Some, such

as those in Sinn Féin, see the matter in the context of the wider devolution of fiscal powers. However, there seems to be consensus across the Assembly that a reduction in corporation tax would be helpful and pro-business and would help to grow the economy.

I do not want to pour cold water on the debate, but there is a need to bring some balance to it. I am not so sure that we have heard absolute balance in the arguments that have been put forward.

Ms Purvis: Will the Member give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will give way in a moment.

I accept that, in a five-minute speech, Members will focus on the strong points that they want to make rather than deal with some of the contrary points. I will give way to the Member, who I am sure will make one of those contrary points.

Ms Purvis: I thank the Minister for giving way. Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to participate in the debate. Does the Minister agree that a universal benefit to business in the form of an unconditional tax rebate could go into the back pockets of businesses and that, if conditions such as investment in research and development or job creation were placed on a reduction in corporation tax, that may lead to the expected growth that was mentioned by some during the debate?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will come to that point later on. The Member is right; however, as I will point out, that would create considerable difficulties and some opposition.

11.45 am

Based on the report, there seems to be consensus that a reduction in corporation tax will bring benefits to job delivery. On the face of it, no one can deny the fact that if companies can keep more of their profits, they may invest in Northern Ireland and create more jobs. That seems to be a fairly sound argument. However, no one apart from Mr McDonnell put a figure on the number of jobs that would be created. He spoke about the creation of some 90,000 jobs over the 11-year period.

The report outlines the creation of a number of jobs based on the most generous assumptions. For example, it mentions the multiplier effects

of a reduction in corporation tax. It refers to the multiplier effect of all the benefits but not the downward multiplier effects of some of the costs. Members have mentioned the costs in today's debate. For example, a loss of public sector jobs would reduce spending power. That is a downward multiplier effect, so it has to be accepted that there is a two-way movement.

I have not heard anyone query the assumption in the report, which examines the period from 2002 to 2009, that the world background will remain broadly neutral. We know that the world background is not broadly neutral because we are in the middle of one of our deepest recessions. Foreign investment is drying up, and not as much is available. The report also assumes that foreign direct investment (FDI) will be based on the 2002-09 figures. However, foreign direct investment fluctuates. Indeed, the report includes a graph that shows that foreign direct investment fluctuates quite considerably. In the recession, it has fallen by between 20% and 40%.

Projecting from the past and assuming that job creation will be the same as in the 2002-09 period gives an unrealistic assumption of the job potential that will result from a reduction in corporation tax. It also assumes that the job gains will be distributed in much the same way as they were in the Irish Republic during the period in which it had the tax advantage. It is not a realistic assumption. Many of the job predictions are based on fairly generous assumptions. My Department wrote to the authors of the report about four weeks ago and raised a number of questions about the model's assumptions. We have not had a response to date, but I hope that we will get one.

That brings me to what Alban Maginness rightly identified as the "big question": how do we pay for it? Mr O'Loan asked how much we will have to pay. Corporation tax paid in Northern Ireland amounts to some £340 million to £520 million. The authors of the report assumed that it would be £200 million, and Varney assumed that it would be £300 million. The Treasury figure was given to Varney, and I imagine that the Treasury will want to attribute other costs. For example, trying to police the displacement of businesses and profits can be quite expensive. Will that be passed on in cost terms to Northern Ireland? The costs are fairly substantial.

Mr McDevitt: On the question of cost, we must start with the facts. The most relevant fact that we need to know is the current level of corporation tax in this region. What does the Minister expect to collect this year? Many of us assume that that is a rather small amount of money, although perhaps the Minister will correct me. Unless we know the answer to that question, we cannot begin to speculate about the true cost.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member must not have been listening to me. The report assumes that the level of corporation tax would be £200 million, and Varney assumes that it would be £300 million. It depends on the methodology used, but the lowest figure that I have is £340 million, and the highest figure is £520 million.

So, those are the figures for the tax take.

However, there is also the issue of what happens if small businesses decide to incorporate in order to benefit from the lower rate of corporation tax. That would increase the figure further. Therefore, the costs are substantial and will have to be borne by the Executive because of the Azores ruling, to which a number of Members have referred. That, in turn, creates an issue for the Executive. Members remember the angst created in the Chamber last year when we had to look at redistributing — not saving — £340 million.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Member give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: No. I have given way enough and the Member has had his chance to speak. I want to get some of these points over.

There was considerable angst during the period when we had to examine the Budget. Next year, on top of potential spending cuts, should we have to redistribute money towards corporation tax reductions? Such reductions, as the Member for East Belfast pointed out, could be made in all kinds of ways. For example, should we give corporation tax reductions to banks — which are cutting jobs — because they are one of the biggest profit-earners in Northern Ireland? Should we refuse to give corporation tax reductions to existing firms in Northern Ireland? As the Member pointed out, if we are only going to reduce corporation tax to reward job creation, firms that simply maintain the current number of jobs will not qualify. Then, we will hear the

accusation, so often made in Northern Ireland, that indigenous industry is being ignored and that the Government are interested only in the glitzy firms from abroad. Do we allow corporation tax reductions on the basis of export potential?

All of those aspects require further administration and examination of the tax. When I was teaching economics, one of the points I often repeated from Adam Smith's famous canons of taxation was that, when collecting tax, there should be taxes that are easily administered. We do not want a huge cost-burden to be attached to the administration of tax.

I can see why the Member for East Belfast wanted to direct us down the path of making corporation tax reduction conditional, but that adds to the administrative burden. It also carries the implication that local firms may feel that they have not been properly dealt with.

The other issue is that when corporation tax is reduced, there is an immediate cost to the public purse but not necessarily an immediate benefit in job creation. Some Members have pointed that out. Mr Simpson, who has now left the Chamber, said that he did not want the difference going into the back pockets of executives or, presumably, shareholders. Unless we go down the route suggested by the Member for East Belfast and make corporation tax reduction very conditional, there is no guarantee that the money will not go, at least initially, to the shareholders. One may not get the job creation potential that many Members have talked about in the debate.

Therefore, a redistribution of money from jobs in the public sector to the pockets of shareholders in the private sector will not necessarily help to bring about the rebalancing of the economy that I and many others have publicly advocated. That is another issue that needs to be addressed.

Mr McDonnell and other Members said that a reduction in corporation tax will pay for itself quickly; but it will not, and the report indicates that. For the first six years, there will be a negative figure; then we will break even; and then we will recoup some of the money over the following five years.

It will take 11 years for the proposal to pay for itself. I understand that rebalancing the economy is not something that can be done with a click of the fingers; but it has to be accepted

that this proposal is not going to be the quick fix that some people have mentioned.

A number of Members have said that it is important that we now fight for this and that we go forward on a united front. Mr Neeson talked about bringing it to the fore and Mr Simpson said that where there is a will there is a way; however, there are considerable barriers with respect to deliverability. There is the barrier of the EU, although there is the Azores ruling. The EU Commission might not be too happy with the proposal, but the European Court would probably give permission for it. Her Majesty's Treasury will have to be convinced, and it will require legislation in Parliament. However, in a Parliament in which minority parties from Wales and Scotland will hold sway, I doubt very much whether it will be easy to put legislation such as this through without other areas of the United Kingdom demanding that they be given the same benefit and opportunities. If they do so, the competitive advantage that Members have talked about this proposal giving us will not necessarily emerge.

As for the way forward, I have no doubt this is a useful argument in which to engage as part of the economic debate. I simply want to try and bring balance to the debate on this issue. Through the Executive, we already have our economic strategy in place for Northern Ireland. If we are going to rebalance the economy in Northern Ireland then we do not want immediate and costly reductions in the block grant. I do not think that those who have argued, and argued very vociferously against me in this Chamber when it came to the Budget discussions last year, would thank me if we simply walked into this matter.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We have a balanced economic strategy at present. We have to build up the infrastructure and ensure that we have the right people skills in Northern Ireland. That is the policy that we ought to stick with.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank everybody for their contributions. The case for a reduced rate of corporation tax has been on the mind of the Assembly for some time. That has been the situation for almost three years now; first, through the Varney Review of Tax Policy and

subsequently through the Economic Reform Group report, which we are debating today.

One of the main benefits of the report is that it addresses some of the confusion arising from the Varney review, in that it moves the debate forward by clarifying a number of the legal issues and other barriers. Although there are still hurdles, I believe that the report advances the case.

Even prior to the restoration of devolution, the Committee on the Preparation for Government and the Committee on the Programme for Government had examined the issue in detail in 2006 and 2007. Their work demonstrated how, as Members have talked about already, the North has one of the least prosperous economies, with low productivity and low living standards being the key economic problems.

The work of those Committees highlighted the need to attract FDI companies in the high-productivity sectors and concluded that an approach involving more of the same — that is, marginal improvements to existing policy instruments — will fail to rebalance the economy. We need to be looking at measures that will rebalance the economy here; new measures, because it is clear that existing measures are not working. The inquiries by those Committees concluded that a competitive rate of corporation tax is an essential ingredient, together with measures in respect of infrastructure, education and skills, for enabling a step change in our local economy and for leading to sustainable economic growth.

12.00 noon

The independent review of economic policy, which reported in September last year, acknowledged that a reduced rate of corporation tax would increase the competitiveness of the North. However, it pointed out that the review was unable to consider the matter within its terms of reference. The case for a competitive rate of corporation tax received prominence in the manifestos of a number of the local parties in advance of last week's election. Therefore, I welcome this timely debate, which provides Members with the opportunity to explore the issue even further.

I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for proposing the motion. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Finance

and Personnel take a continuing interest in corporation tax. We will take on board all the contributions that have been made by Members as we consider how best the matter can be taken forward.

Rather than simply going over the points that have been made, I will draw on some of the themes that have come out of the debate. Probably most important are the potential benefits of a competitive corporation tax rate. Undoubtedly, encouraging investment through larger FDI flows will have a positive impact on the local economy, particularly in respect of attracting the high value sectors, which offer better-paid jobs and export-led growth.

The Economic Reform Group has argued that reducing the rate of corporation tax would bring substantial benefits over a 20-year period — we have to consider the long term as well as the short term — including 90,000 extra jobs. It is clear that there is a cost in introducing that lower rate of corporation tax. However, as with all economic matters, results cannot simply be understood by considering the short term. Although total tax revenue would fall, the group suggests that that would be offset within a six-year period through additional revenues from income tax, National Insurance contributions and VAT. Therefore, reducing the rate of corporation tax must be given serious consideration.

It has also been noted that a number of steps, some of which may prove difficult technically, are required before such a move can be made. However, despite their differences, the Varney review of tax policy in the North and the Economic Reform Group report agree that, technically, the rate of corporation tax could be reduced, provided that certain conditions are met. The Azores judgement of the European Court of Justice in 2006 laid the foundations to make that possible. Should the Executive decide to pursue that route, it would not be an impossible task, providing that support is garnered from the Westminster Government and the European Union.

As the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment outlined, a first step in the process of reducing the rate of corporation tax would be the requirement for corporation tax-varying powers to be devolved to the Assembly. Some Members spoke about tax-varying powers in general, but that is a

debate for another day. However, we need to be mindful that we may need to look at that issue in the near future. As was rightly highlighted by a number of Members, there will be implications for the block grant if the Executive decide to pursue that route. Although it is unclear what the amount may finally be, the Economic Reform Group estimates a reduction in the block grant of around 2%. However, it also highlights that, based on experience in the South of Ireland, there is the possibility that no tax revenue reduction would occur.

Those short-term costs must be weighed up against the potential long-term gains that could be made if the strategy were adopted. As I have mentioned, increased employment here will lead to increased revenues from income tax and National Insurance contributions, alongside a reduction in the number of the long-term unemployed. It is vital that we do not look at corporation tax in isolation but consider all the factors involved. Many Members have talked about the unemployment figures and how we can create employment opportunities and higher wages that will lead to a better quality of life for people. We need to keep that in view when we are looking at the issue.

There may also be scope to explore the possibilities of negotiating with the British Treasury a phased reduction in corporation tax because that may be one way through the pain that a decrease in the block grant would bring. Clearly, the Executive have an important role to play in all those considerations. The Programme for Government gives priority to developing an innovative and productive economy. There is no doubt that implementing the recommendations of the independent review of economic policy, which falls within the existing powers of the Assembly, will continue to be high on the Executive's agenda. However, there is an argument that the logic of devolution places an onus on the Executive to give serious consideration to the case for acquiring corporation tax-varying powers.

Although reducing the rate of corporation tax would be just one tool available to the Executive, it would be an important one. The Committee for Finance and Personnel wrote to the Minister to request specifically that he consider establishing an Executive subgroup to examine the matter in detail. Corporation tax is a complex subject, and I am grateful to Members for giving it careful consideration. It

is in the best interests of the local economy to explore all options that are open to us to make the North as competitive and attractive as possible to potential investors.

I welcome today's cross-party support for the need to place renewed emphasis on examining the case for corporation tax-varying powers. The important point to take from the debate is that we must maintain a united front. Most Members who spoke were in favour of and positive about the motion. Ahead of opening up discussions with the new British Government and in subsequent negotiations with the Treasury, that approach will put us on a good footing.

I thank the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and I hope that we can continue to explore ways in which to keep the issue of a competitive rate of corporation tax on the agenda. In their contributions, Members gave us much food for thought.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the report from the Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group on the case for a reduced rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland.

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities

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. 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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Lord Browne: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward a strategy to make the facilities of schools more available for use by local communities at evenings, weekends and during the summer holidays.

I am pleased to propose the motion. However, at the outset, I make it clear that I accept Mr McNarry's amendment. I know that he has worked hard to create his private Member's Bill, and, if a strategy is introduced now, schools will be well prepared when the Bill eventually becomes law. However, to date, there have been stumbling blocks, which I hope can be dealt with today so that real progress can be made on the Bill.

In the current economic climate, finding areas in which savings can be made without affecting the provision of services is one of the biggest challenges that the Assembly faces. One of the best methods of making those savings is to find ways to use the same facilities for different purposes. Such an opportunity exists with schools' facilities. We all know that for the majority of the year, particularly at weekends and during the long summer holidays, schools' facilities and playing fields lie idle. There appears to be no reason why those facilities should not be put to use, thus providing a place for communities to meet, be educated and participate in sport.

There are three areas on which a strategy would have an impact: improved community facilities; associated benefits for schools; and strategic investment targeting. It is no secret that Northern Ireland has some of the poorest community facilities in the United Kingdom. Those facilities, which range from community centres to leisure centres, have

suffered from years of underinvestment and poor maintenance. Many of them are coming to the end of their useful life. Many Members have served on councils, so they know the huge cost that would be involved to bring facilities up to modern standards. Therefore, if we want to be sure that communities have access to usable facilities, a strategy to open up schools' facilities is essential.

It needs to be recognised that not only is the taxpayer currently footing the bill to maintain community and school facilities that are often within a short walking distance of each other but we are paying huge amounts to keep our school classrooms and pitches empty over the summer. At the same time, we use public money to fund community sports and other facilities in their place. Even the Department recognises that there is only a marginal difference in the cost of opening up school facilities rather than keeping them closed. However, that would allow us to save vast sums each year on providing substitute facilities. It should be clear to most that the incurred cost of indemnifying schools outside core opening hours would be only a fraction of the cost required to run additional community facilities.

It is regrettable that Northern Ireland lags behind the rest of the UK in opening up its schools for use by the wider community. Although the extended schools programme has existed for years, it has not really had the desired impact on the ground. Indeed, last week, the House heard from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure that only a few schools had really undertaken the task contained in the extended schools programme. There are reasons for that, and I am sure that Members will touch on them. However, a large number of the issues that have made many schools reluctant to open their facilities to the community focus on child protection and insurance. It seems that clear, direct and reassuring guidance from the Department is needed to give schools the confidence to know that opening to the community does not set them up for some sort of disaster.

We must not forget the benefits of this strategy for schools. If such a strategy were put in place, schools would be ideally positioned to benefit from increased co-operation and interaction with their communities as well as increased investment in the long term. It should be clear to most that genuine advances can be

made when schools work in partnership with their local communities. Doing that not only improves the provision that a school can make through understanding the needs of a particular community but, when schools become involved with communities, children become less likely to drop out of school and less likely to vandalise that school precisely because the school is seen as part of the community, not a place apart.

Mr McCarthy: I agree that the motion is important. However, I know of an instance in which schools were open to the community, but, unfortunately, those schools charged far too much. The community was not in a position to pay what they asked. I hope that we support the motion, but, if we do, does the Member agree with me that it is imperative that schools consider how much people can pay?

Lord Browne: I take the Member's point, and I hope to touch on that issue later. I believe that an increase in community use of schools would mean that the money that would otherwise have been spent on maintaining and servicing the decaying community centres would naturally follow. That money could then be used to improve the infrastructure of schools to the benefit of children and adults alike. Strategic investment in school facilities is vitally important for the future and would be the real success of the strategy. The Assembly would be remiss not to support and to bring forward immediately a strategy that simultaneously ensures that facilities are available for community use, that we receive value-for-money provision and that money invested in improving school facilities for communities also results in better classrooms and sports facilities for schoolchildren.

I am sure that the Minister is familiar with Malcolm Gladwell's much acclaimed book 'Outliers', in which he demonstrates that working-class children tend to fall behind their middle-class counterparts because they do not engage in academic activities over the summer holidays. It is regrettable that the Minister has not seen fit to develop a strategy that would promote activities for the whole community, including working-class children, in particular.

12.15 pm

It is also important for the Department to show leadership on the issue. It is unfortunate that the Department, having had many years to bring forward a strategy, has failed to do

so in any meaningful way. It is not enough to say that it is the responsibility of individual schools to organise. As I said, many schools look to the Department for clear guidance on child protection and insurance issues but receive no clear answers. Regardless of who is legally responsible for making school facilities available for community use, I urge the Minister to develop a strategy that every school can follow. The Department of Education has the opportunity to develop a comprehensive strategy that, most importantly, can be co-ordinated across all schools. That is something that individual schools acting alone cannot do. I am pleased to support the motion, as amended.

Mr McNarry: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"notes the private Member's Bill, Community Use of School Premises Bill, and the review being undertaken by the Minister of Education into community use of schools; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward, accordingly, a strategy to make the facilities of schools more available for use by local communities at evenings, weekends and during the summer holidays."

I thank Lord Browne for the generosity of his opening remarks; I much appreciate them. I laid a private Member's Bill, the Community Use of School Premises Bill, before the House on 13 November 2008. I presented my Bill to the Education Committee, which gave it a very warm reception. Subsequently, the Bill initiated a review by the Minister of Education of the community use of schools, which I welcomed. That review is ongoing, and I have, therefore, chosen not to progress the Bill at this stage. However, in the absence of progress, that option is still open to me.

I introduced a private Member's Bill because inadequate use is made of the massive potential resources of the schools estate in Northern Ireland, and the Department has failed to use its powers creatively to make better use of that public resource. The Bill aims to maximise the use of the schools estate across Northern Ireland outside the school day and the school term. The Bill would require school guardians to produce schemes providing for the use of their premises and facilities when they are not required for educational purposes.

The importance of the resource is reflected in the new fiscal climate in which charities and

community groups will face funding stress. That is the sad reality of a reduced fiscal position and reducing funding from Europe. They will need all the resources and help that they can get to facilitate a healthy society in Northern Ireland. Communities will also have to tackle some of the problems that they face in different ways, and the community use of schools is an innovative solution to a shortage of facilities. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we unlock one of the greatest resources that local communities have but, at present, do not use.

The potential benefits in education, health, community spirit and support for vulnerable people are great. A PricewaterhouseCoopers study from 2003 found that opening school buildings to local groups engendered a sense of community ownership of the facilities to the extent — this is important — that they believe that levels of vandalism are often lower where schools are utilised by the community and there is a deep sense of pride in the community and in those facilities. Indoor and outdoor school facilities can be used for adult learning, youth activities, recreation, social services, healthcare and cultural and social activities. Communities know that. Those facilities are on their doorstep, and they want access to them. There are opportunities on our doorsteps to make our society bigger and better at a limited cost — important in this financial climate — to the taxpayer.

I met departmental officials and members of the task team who were carrying out the Minister's review last year, and I was pleased with the update that they gave me and the way in which they were approaching the review. However, I have heard nothing from the Department in response to the telephone calls that I made subsequently to ask how it was getting on or to my requests for updates on what it was doing. It is important that that point is transmitted to the House, because this is a community issue with a focus on the use of community facilities. I am pleased to see that the Minister is in her place, and I look forward to her response today on the proposal.

The Executive need more innovative ideas to get the most from the resources that they have. There is a great deal of potential in the proposal, and I know that it would be well supported in communities. That support and the subject of communities and their needs were communicated to me on the doorsteps during the recent election campaign.

I thank the Members led by Lord Browne for tabling the motion, and I hope that they will continue to support my efforts to have the Minister's review published. It would be regrettable if that were not the case, but, if it is, I hope that they will support my private Member's Bill. The Members who tabled the motion have opened the issue up for debate. The House is grateful for that, and the receiving public will acknowledge what is said in the House today.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion and Mr McNarry's amendment. The Member who moved the motion said that schools, by and large, are at the heart of all our communities. That is particularly the case in rural areas, where schools often act as community centres, as meeting points when anything goes wrong and as sports facilities that are used by the entire community. Indeed, all Members could cite examples of how that works in practice in their local area.

Those examples of schools' positive engagement with the community are set out under article 140 of the Education Reform Order 1989, which encourages schools to make their premises available:

"(when not required by or in connection with the school)".

Therefore, schools are encouraged to use their facilities for members of the community, and that provision was further enhanced when the extended schools programme was launched. That programme supports the highest-ranked socially disadvantaged schools, seeks to extend the school as the hub of the community and encourages engagement with neighbouring schools, government Departments, voluntary groups and community sector organisations to best meet the needs of young people.

When a school prepares its action plan under that programme it is required to consult the local community and assess whether there are particular needs that could be met by the school and the use of its premises. Obviously not all needs can be met, but schools are encouraged to meet them where possible. The extended schools programme has been developed over the past number of years, has maximised the use of the schools estate and has affirmed the role that schools play in our communities. However, that being said, examples have been

alluded to of schools that do not open their doors to the communities around them, and that must be addressed.

In recognition of the role that schools play in the community, Mr McNarry previously introduced a private Member's Bill that would make it compulsory for schools to make their premises available. That is a plausible aim, but there are implications that must be considered, and the Minister, in recognition of the principle behind Mr McNarry's Bill, undertook a review of the broader implications of opening our school doors to the wider community. All the issues associated with that, such as insurance, health and safety and the additional costs that schools may encounter, must be examined, and we hope to achieve that through the review.

I noticed from the Minister's answer to a question from another Member that she established a working group, which recently reported its findings to the Minister. We await the outcome of the review as quickly as possible, because, undoubtedly, we should continue to enhance the community use of school premises, which has implications not only for the Department of Education but a range of other Departments and for voluntary organisations. However, it is important that we are mindful of protecting the decisions of schools and of boards of governors, because, to date, anything that has happened to do with the opening up of school doors has been based on the decisions of boards of governors. When Members debated the ESA, we were keen to support and maintain autonomy for boards of governors, so we must also be mindful of that in this situation. By and large, Sinn Féin will support the motion.

Mr Dallat: I also thank those who tabled the motion, and I acknowledge Mr McNarry's contribution. This could be one of the most exciting things to have happened in the Assembly. I refer to the concept of community schools, which is well established in the Republic of Ireland and in parts of Britain. I understand that there are two or three such schools in the North.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of teaching in a community school, and I have happy memories of how that school operated, reached out into the wider community and embraced people who were past school age. In those days, the concept of lifelong learning was not part of

the educational vocabulary. It is, of course, part of it now, but we have yet to develop the means by which it can be delivered across every town and village in Northern Ireland. After-school activity is the one term that is used, but I like to think that it embraces much more than that.

Mr McNarry mentioned culture, adult education and so on. God knows that, here in the North, 250,000 people between the ages of 16 and 64 have the most basic literacy and numeracy skills. Those people should enjoy equality with everyone else. The community school offers that, and it is sad that, probably due more to direct rule than anything, it is more than 30 years since it was discussed seriously. Therefore, I look forward to the private Member's Bill on which Mr McNarry is working.

One aspect is the resources that are needed to deliver. Mrs O'Neill talked about boards of governors. I like to think that, when the community school concept is delivered, it will embrace the view that more people should be responsible for delivering it. It certainly would have to include more people than the school principal and the deputy. Someone with overall responsibility for delivering the additional required services would be needed. Indeed, boards of governors at many schools will need to consider how their school will survive in changing circumstances. For many schools, particularly rural ones, embracing the concept of the community school will save them from closure. I am aware of some good examples, one of which is in Kilrea, where that is a —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: Yes, of course.

Mr Storey: When the Member defines "community school", does he mean the retention of the school for a particular community, as is the case in our divided and segregated educational system, or does he mean a genuinely community school that does not have a bar across the door to certain children attending it?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Member for raising that. To be honest, I never see community as being anything other than the whole community. Indeed, a community school could not function on the basis of not including everyone. That

people could come together would be another advantage of such a concept.

Some people might see the extension of a school's opening hours as being about issues such as fitness. Those issues are, of course, important, given the levels of obesity, but the community school has to go further than that. It has to acknowledge that many people have dropped through the safety net of the existing school network and that they need that second chance to achieve their purpose in life.

12.30 pm

Of course, the demands of employers are changing rapidly, and people who felt that they had skills for life are no longer secure. Indeed, many are unemployed and frantically trying to develop new skills. The community school concept would meet their needs as well.

I feel committed to the subject. During my further education, I completed a diploma in community schools, which included a lot of research on how that concept operates successfully in the Republic and, in particular, in Britain. I appeal passionately to the Assembly and particularly the departmental officials who are listening to the debate to take the matter seriously. It is not just a matter for the Department of Education; it embraces other Departments as well. Following the motion, Mr McNarry's private Member's Bill and the support of the SDLP, which embraced the concept of community schools many years ago, I hope that the Assembly, sooner rather than later, will begin to deliver on the concept of lifelong learning.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be Trevor Lunn.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the amendment. Mr McNarry was absolutely right to refer to his private Member's Bill, which was the starting point for the discussion in 2008. At that time, it was warmly received by the Education Committee. That is hardly a surprise, because the concept of extended use of school facilities by the wider community in the evenings and during the three months of school holidays is such sound common sense that it is a wonder that we did not adopt, or at least examine, it years ago.

The benefits are obvious, and Members who spoke previously — Mr McNarry in particular — made reference to the community benefit, to the plight of community groups and the voluntary sector, and to the health and social benefits. The obstacles, if any, appear to be based on the costs of staff coverage, caretaking and insurance. However, at a time of tight budgets and our inability to provide the community facilities that people demand and deserve, it seems to me that the opportunity to maximise the use of existing facilities as an alternative to building or upgrading is self-evidently cost effective, and that is the route that we should follow. As John Dallat mentioned, there is a major shared future aspect in respect of cross-community usage of school property, and in light of the renewed commitment by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to a shared future strategy, it is perhaps a chance for the Executive, and not just the Education Minister, to demonstrate that commitment. However, it is primarily the Education Minister's review and her response to the debate that we look forward to today.

I know that some boards of governors have reservations about the pure cost to schools of staffing and insurance, but it is surely possible to charge users in a sensible manner to cover the small amount of extra expense, and, if not, the Department of Education and other Departments should think about picking up the tab because of the community benefit, the shared future benefit and the major future capital savings.

As far as the insurance argument is concerned, any groups that use Government or council facilities are normally asked to provide their

own insurance, and I do not see why it should be any different in this case. However, even if there were an argument for extra costs to the Department or the schools, I really do not buy it. I am not privy to the Department's liability insurance arrangements, but the greater risk is surely already covered, and that is the risk involving children, where the duty of care is so much more onerous than that involving adults. Therefore, I really cannot see that the risk is much increased by adults using the facilities.

I hope that the Minister will address the issue urgently and seriously, because it has to be better value to use what we already have and to factor in community use to all replacement and newbuild schools for the future. I look forward to the Minister's response and am perfectly happy to support the motion and the amendment.

Miss McIlveen: I support the motion.

Unsurprisingly, in this case, there has been broad agreement that opening up school facilities for community use is desirable in principle. Increasingly access to, and utilisation of, publicly funded facilities makes sense, particularly in the challenging current climate in which demands are many and resources are few. Adding value is a particularly apt term to use here, as extending access to school facilities to the local community not only represents an efficient and effective use of resources by increasing utilisation and reducing duplication but brings wider benefits.

As other Members have said, opening up our schools can assist in the promotion of good relations and a strong sense of community spirit. It can generate income for a school while still offering subsidised provision for the community. In many cases, recreation and leisure facilities are involved, and that helps to encourage physical activity. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee recently received numerous presentations focusing on the need to get more people to take more exercise. In general terms, sharing facilities through what has been described in some areas as dual-use schemes and similar arrangements represents a win-win scenario for schools and communities. This is especially so in smaller towns and villages in rural areas, which may lack the capacity for significant separate provision and where schools should be at the heart of the community.

Perhaps most uplifting of all is the case of Cortamlet, a controlled primary school close to the south Armagh border. Through funding drawn down by the SELB, the school now has a new multi-purpose hall and synthetic pitch, and has become a real hub for the small, isolated Protestant community in that very rural area. There are many more examples across Northern Ireland where schools have secured synthetic pitches to be shared with the local community. In my constituency of Strangford, West Winds Primary School in Newtownards has such a facility.

Existing facilities can be adapted and improved, but newbuilds have the greatest potential in that regard because community use can be factored in at the planning and design stage, with all potential stakeholders brought on board from the outset of a project to explore all possible opportunities. Although there are many mutual benefits to be realised, any associated costs must be factored into the arrangements, and some support may be required to ensure that schools do not suffer financial losses or be required to charge community users prohibitive rates, an issue that Mr McCarthy raised earlier.

In several schemes that I am aware of, the council, essentially, takes over responsibility for a facility from 5.00 pm, but many models of co-operation can be considered. An example can be found in Portaferry, where St Columba's College has a partnership with Ards Borough Council to provide gym equipment and facilities. The extended schools programme has also been highlighted by other Members. That has helped some schools to see their facilities in a more imaginative light and to forge new partnerships. There is much more potential to be realised in that area, and we have some way to go to catch up with what is happening in that regard in England.

Until now in Northern Ireland, such schemes have tended to be developed on an ad hoc basis as a result of initiatives taken at a local level, and, to date, much has depended on the vision, initiative and drive of particular principals or boards of governors as to whether a school wants to pick up the ball and run with it. Buy-in is crucial to the success of such projects, so we must tread carefully in intervening. Rather than trying to impose onerous obligations or to be prescriptive or restrictive about making school facilities available for community use, we should seek to encourage collaboration because, as

we find with so many issues, one size does not necessarily fit all.

It should be the role of the Minister and her Department, working with other agencies, to remove obstacles, provide incentives and create the circumstances under which such schemes will be regarded as desirable and viable in local areas. Good governance arrangements and strong relationships, underpinned by a partnership approach, are vital to such schemes being successfully developed and sustained. Increasing community use of school facilities is consistent with some other themes of our Administration, including joined-up government and community planning and, in education, area-based planning and delivery of the revised curriculum.

In conclusion, the type of approach under discussion has huge potential, and in encouraging schools and communities to embrace it as a way forward, we must ensure that they are supported and that every effort is made to minimise any potential for problems.

Mr Ross: We have brought agreement to the Chamber today on this issue. As is the case in such debates, it is often difficult to find something novel to say when speaking at this late stage. Lord Browne put the debate in context very well when he spoke about potential savings. Increasingly, as we debate issues in the House, we must look for value for taxpayers' money. We should always have done that, but it has now been placed in sharper focus. In the schools estate, many schools across the country are not used at night-time and sit idle during the summer months, and we identified that those facilities could be used not only to get value for money but to provide community benefits.

Members spoke about vandalism in the schools estate. Vandalism occurs in the summer, when no one is around and schools are sitting idle. The approach under discussion could help that situation. Through projects such as the extended schools programme or the use of schools for community benefit, assistance is given to schools so that their facilities can be used by communities.

It has also been said that the extended schools principle has not really taken off in Northern Ireland, and that is probably true. We may be able to point to a number of examples in our constituencies where schools are being used

by community groups or on an ad hoc basis. However, in comparison with other regions of the United Kingdom, it is clear that the principle has not taken off in Northern Ireland, and we must change that.

Schools should be seen less as buildings that are used only from 9 am to 4 pm and more as an important part of the community. In previous debates in the House on the importance of rural schools, it has often been said that they are more than just schools because they are at the heart of the community. Schools in rural areas are used by and for the community, and we must try to extend that across the rest of the country. We know that schools are already used for breakfast, after-school and homework clubs, but they should also be used at night-time by the local community for other activities. I said that Northern Ireland is the poor relation of the UK in respect of how schools are used. In England, half of primary schools are used for other activities aside from education, and a third of secondary schools are used for similar purposes. Northern Ireland, therefore, has some way to go.

Mr Dallat spoke about the need to open up schools for evening classes for adults. Adult learning, computer courses, which use the IT facilities that many schools have now, and arts and crafts can all play an important role in the community.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He will be aware of the correspondence that we received today from the organisation that represents further and higher education colleges. Many of the activities to which the Member referred could easily be facilitated by that sector. Its colleges have the capacity and should be included in the proposals. The remit of what was proposed in Mr McNarry's Bill can, therefore, be extended.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for his intervention. He is absolutely right. Many further education colleges probably have even better facilities that are particularly suited to adult learning or adults who wish to take up a hobby or to learn something new. That should certainly be taken into consideration today. The Minister for Employment and Learning should also take note of that, because it is something on which he and the Minister of Education could collaborate.

Over the summer, many schools run summer schemes and open their sports facilities not

just to pupils but to the wider community. That is a common sense approach to take. I know that Mr McNarry's private Member's Bill has been stalled somewhat. It is frustrating for Mr McNarry and those of us who saw the Bill as a sensible way forward that there has not been any progress on it. I, therefore, congratulate my colleague Lord Browne for tabling the motion and reigniting the issue.

I know that there have been issues about insurance, which has been a stumbling block. However, Mr Lunn, who probably knows more about insurance than most of us, said that that should not be a problem. I hope that the Minister is not using the issue of insurance as a stumbling block and that she will make every effort to try to find a way round any health and safety difficulties so that we can make full use of the schools estate and the wider community can benefit from that. I am happy to support the motion and the amendment.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I begin my contribution speaking as a member of the Education Committee. I want to inform the House of the Committee's involvement in the matter through its scrutiny of Mr McNarry's private Member's Bill on the community use of school premises. The Committee received a presentation from Mr McNarry on his Bill in September 2008 and commissioned a comprehensive briefing paper from the Department of Education on the specifics of the Bill. On receipt of that and an Assembly research paper on the Bill, the Committee heard again from Mr McNarry before concluding that although it agreed with the underlying intentions of the Bill to increase wider community access to school facilities outside the school day, it could not agree specific support for a number of reasons.

Those reasons include the fact that some 450 schools already benefit from extended schools funding that provides for a wide range of activities outside schools hours; the Department of Education's claim that most schools operate an open-door policy and already make provision for the use of their premises by the local community; the fact that the Bill's proposals could result in significant additional expenditure for schools, such as fuel, caretaking and insurance costs, as well as the Department of Education's concerns about health and safety in schools; and, finally, the Committee's concerns about whether school principals would

welcome the added bureaucracy that would be necessary to administer the mandatory schemes required in the Bill.

2.15 pm

The Committee concluded that a better way forward is for the Department to issue appropriate guidance to all schools that encourages the community use of school facilities. Such guidance would promote good practice, and consideration should be given to providing incentives for schools to make their premises available to the community.

Following the Committee's request to the Department of Education in May 2009 for a full updated position on community use of school premises in the context of Mr McNarry's private Member's Bill, the Minister of Education agreed to establish a small informal working group made up of educational stakeholders who would make suggestions and recommendations on how best to increase the use of school premises. In September 2009, the Committee suggested that Mr McNarry meet the chairperson of the working group, Ms Arthur, to receive an update on progress. He did that on 11 November 2009, and he received a further short progress note on the working group in early December 2009, which included details of its meetings and consultations with external agencies, such as community and voluntary groups. An initial draft report was to be ready in early 2010, and in mid-April 2010, the Committee reminded the Department that that was overdue and requested a progress update. The Committee has yet to receive that update.

I hope that that overview informs the debate and shows that the Committee for Education has been proactive in working with the Department of Education to increase wider community access to school facilities.

I turn now to my party's position on the issue. The SDLP believes that it is important to encourage and to facilitate the wider community use of school premises. Mr Dallat outlined in detail our support for the broader concept of the community school. We believe that it is better to achieve community use of schools through encouragement and incentivisation rather than by compulsion. That is one reason why we disagreed with the methodology employed in Mr McNarry's private Member's Bill, although we agreed with its general aim and direction.

We note that 45% of the schools estate is not in public ownership. As a consequence, the Department of Education has no statutory rights that would enable it to make those schools available for community use. It is worth noting that in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, the emphasis is always on encouraging schools and removing obstacles rather than on compulsion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: We support the motion and the amendment and will vote accordingly.

Mr G Robinson: I am grateful to be able to support this important motion. As every Member knows, our young people and communities in Northern Ireland are telling us that they want and need more facilities for recreational and other purposes in the evenings, at weekends and at holiday times. I am convinced that that could, in some cases, cut back on antisocial behaviour.

Last year, in my Limavady constituency, I saw the perfect example of how schools can have top-class facilities that are also a community asset. Limavady Grammar School has a new all-weather sports pitch, which is available to the entire community during the evenings. That has been a very successful scheme, and it proves that co-operation benefits an entire community.

Schools are regarded as a community asset, so why should they be unavailable for community use when children are not at school? I firmly believe that there is an easy solution to what we are being told is a lack in the provision of services for young people and all other age groups in the community. Publicly owned buildings are lying empty and unused when the need for sporting facilities or venues for other community-based activities is at its greatest.

I appreciate that difficulties will be placed in the way of such a simple idea, and it is up to the Minister and her colleagues to overcome them. A school should be used and appreciated as an asset to a community and be available for use when required. In some cases, that multifunctional use may also reduce the need for local councils to build new recreational facilities using very tight budgets.

The motion is about a practical and effective way of providing facilities on a value-for-money basis through the use of existing resources.

I can only ask that all Members support the motion and show good sense so that we fully utilise our existing facilities and provide for a community need. I support the motion and the amendment.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. A Cheann Comhairle, tá mé iontach sásta deis a fháil le plé a dhéanamh ar an ngá le rochtain pobail ar áiseanna scoile a mhéadú taobh amuigh de ghnáthuaireanta na scoile. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht ar an gceist seo, nó aithníim féin gur acmhainn thábhachtach pobail í áitreabh na scoile agus aontaím gurbh fhéidir agus gur chóir níos mó a dhéanamh le húsáid níos fearr a bhaint as na háiseanna seo.

I am very pleased to get the opportunity to debate with Members the need to increase community access to school facilities outside normal school hours. I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue, because I, too, recognise that school premises represent a significant public resource. I also agree that more could, and should, be done to make sure that we make better use of such facilities.

The 2008 private Member's Bill on the community use of schools premises highlighted that important issue. I was unable to support the Bill at that time, because it was entirely prescriptive. By putting a statutory requirement on schools, it would have meant an extra bureaucratic burden for schools, and, most notably, the proposals would have inevitably resulted in significant expenditure, which, set against competing priorities for education, the Department would have had considerable difficulty finding. In addition, it was not clear how the proposals in the Bill would add value to existing provision.

The Bill did not, therefore, represent an appropriate way forward. However, at that time, I underlined my ongoing commitment to increasing the community use of schools, and I indicated that my Department would look at alternative ways of achieving that. I will say more about the working group shortly.

Some schools often appear isolated from the community and are viewed as buildings that are designed to educate children and organised to deliver the curriculum. Keeping school buildings open and making facilities available for the community can help parents and the wider community to feel a connection to a school.

I want to see schools opening their gates and their doors to the local community. I want local communities to own their schools and, from that sense of ownership, to see their schools as hubs in the community that offer so much more than teaching and offer education in its widest sense. I want local schools to be at the heart of the community, and I want young people to see schools as theirs. I want young people to see schools as places that they should value and protect, not because they have to but because they want to. I want young people to be able to access school playing fields, playgrounds and equipment outside the school day.

Creidim go daingean gur chóir naisc níos láidre a chothú idir scoileanna agus na pobail ar a bhfreastalaíonn siad, agus tá fíis agam gur chóir go n-oibreodh scoileanna i gcomhpháirtíocht le muintir na háite.

I was at a school this morning — St Louise's Comprehensive College in Belfast — having a discussion about post-primary reform and equality in education. I can see the value of parents, teachers and young people in particular feeling that a school is theirs.

As we all know, communities can be a very positive influence on schools and vice versa. The benefits of engaging the community and, in particular, parents and families have long been recognised for the contribution that that can make to improving attitudes to education and raising standards. Parental involvement in a child's education impacts considerably on the child's engagement in school and on his or her educational outcomes. I am committed to promoting the wider use of school premises in an effort to serve the needs of the pupils in the schools, their parents, families and wider communities, and I want to see our young people empowered.

A key education policy for school improvement, Every School a Good School, highlights the importance of supporting and strengthening the links that many schools have made with their local communities. Maintaining clear links with a local community is recognised as an important attribute of any good school, and research evidence indicates that effective performance can be characterised through the existence of a range of indicators, including a school and its teachers being held in respect by parents and the local community, who, in turn, actively support the work of that school. Schools use

their involvement in particular programmes, for example, extended or specialist schools, effectively to meet the needs of communities and nearby schools.

The advantages of making school facilities available for wider community use outside the normal school day are, therefore, clearly evident, and it is already my Department's policy to encourage schools to do so, primarily through programmes such as extended schools. I was glad that I was able to maintain the funding levels for that important programme in 2010-11, and I was able to do so because of the contribution that those resources are making to overcoming barriers to learning in schools that serve some of the most disadvantaged communities. Almost 480 schools will once again benefit from £10 million funding in 2010-11 to provide a range of programmes that reflect and respond to the needs of their pupils and communities.

We also have two full-service pilot programmes, one in north Belfast and the other in west Belfast. Both are seeking to establish and maintain strong links not only between schools but between schools and the local communities, and across a range of statutory agencies, the business community, the voluntary and community sector and, crucially, parents. We will review those pilots, and use the findings to publish a strategy for further development of that concept.

Schools can offer opportunities for adult or family learning, leading to enhanced career or job prospects; opportunities for local people to avail themselves of social, arts and cultural activities; or sporting or recreational activities that may not be available elsewhere in the local area.

Má bhíonn caidreamh láidir éifeachtach idir scoileanna agus na daoine a bhfuil cónaí orthu sa cheantar, cuireann sé seo go mór le comhtháthú an phobail, rud a théann chun leas na sochaí i gcoitinne.

A strong and effective relationship between schools and those living in the local area aids community cohesion, which in turn benefits society as a whole. In the current economic climate, making the most effective use of school facilities also presents an opportunity to deliver real value for money, and by maximising existing school resources, the duplication of provision or unnecessary waste of funds can be avoided.

There are many excellent examples of community use of school premises, and many schools have been involved in that for many years. They are too numerous to mention in full, but I would like to choose some examples. One primary school offers a daily breakfast club, mini-rugby, modern dance and wrap-around childcare. The school is viewed as a vital hub for the community, with the principal having agreed arrangements with various local groups to use the school premises in the evenings to deliver healthy-living activities, adult ICT and traditional Irish music classes.

There is a post-primary school that serves local needs through the provision of accommodation for a GAA centre of excellence and for a local pipers' club. It also offers Saturday schools for local children of Polish or Lithuanian backgrounds, as well as Irish-language classes. There is a primary school that offers a range of activities, including a breakfast club, day care centre, a community support zone, and evening programmes, such as music, adult education classes and youth clubs. There is an Irish-medium school that offers the use of its facilities to a number of sports clubs, including a jujitsu club, which moved to the school after the closure of the local leisure centre. Various community groups or organisations, including Barnardo's and Irish dancers, use the school to host events, and cultural events are held there during Féile an Earraigh and Féile an Phobail.

2.30 pm

Sílím go bhfuil muid ar fad ar aon intinn faoi cé chomh fiúntach is a bheadh sé áiseanna scoile a dhéanamh níos inrochtana. Ach tá roinnt mhaith scoileanna go fóill nach gcuireann a gcuid áiseanna ar fáil d'úsáid an phobail i gcoitinne agus scoileanna a d'fhéadfadh a soláthar don phobal a mhéadú.

We all agree on the merits of making school facilities more accessible. However, there remain a substantial number of schools that either make little or no provision for the wider community use of their facilities or whose existing provision could be improved. Schools, when opening their doors to the community outside normal school hours, must consider many practical issues, such as insurance, health and safety, wear and tear, caretakers, and extra heating and lighting. Schools will incur additional expenditure as a result, and there are

issues about how to recoup those costs, but those obstacles are not insurmountable.

By drawing on the existing good practice of schools that engage with their community, and in recognition of the need to improve current levels of community provision in many other schools, my Department has sought further to promote the wider community use of school premises. As a first step in taking forward that important area of work, I agreed to establish a working group. The group was co-ordinated by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and comprised representatives of key educational stakeholders with expertise in that field: the education and library boards, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Council for Integrated Education, the Governing Bodies Association, the Youth Council and serving school principals and governors who were representative of all school sectors.

The group worked to terms of reference that included identifying the existing barriers to increasing the community use of schools and proposing workable and practical solutions to overcome those barriers in ways that would avoid placing unnecessary administrative or cost burdens on schools. The group was asked to produce a report to include examples of good or best practice that could be disseminated as guidance to schools. It was also asked to outline a set of recommendations to inform policy and operations with regard to enhancing the community use of school premises.

The working group has completed its task, and it presented its report to the Department in March 2010. The report identified good practice, case studies and related guidance, all of which aim to give encouragement, help and support to schools in dealing with the many practical issues that must be considered in making their facilities available for community use.

Cuimsíonn an tuairisc réimse leathan moltaí atá ceaptha chun cur leis an úsáid a bhaineann an pobal as scoileanna. Tá na moltaí á mbreathnú faoi láthair ag feidhmeannaigh sa Roinn chun praiticiúlacht na moltaí a mheas. Cuirfear an obair seo i gcrích roimh i bhfad.

A key focus of the report is on the need for joined-up and collaborative working on a strategic level, not only in my Department, but, as some Members said, across other Departments, agencies, district councils and external organisations. Several of the report's

recommendations fall outside my Department's remit and impact directly on the statutory functions of other Departments or their partner bodies. I will ask relevant ministerial colleagues to consider the report's recommendations, with a view to assessing any potential difficulties that those recommendations may create in the delivery of their core objectives. When that wider consultation has taken place and I have had the opportunity to consider all responses, I will be in a position to bring forward a strategy.

A one-size-fits-all approach cannot be taken to increasing community access to school facilities. Some schools may face complex and challenging issues. Increased access may involve a change of culture for many schools, but such a change will be worth it, because the end result will be worth it.

D'fhonn caidreamh idir pobail áitiúla agus scoileanna a neartú chun úsáid mhéadaithe a éascú, ní mór do na pobail féin ról gníomhach a imirt lena chinntiú go n-úsáidfear acmhainní go héifeachtúil agus go sábháilte.

I hope that the steps that my Department has taken in establishing the working group, the work carried out by its members and the further work required to ensure that the recommendations are viable and constructive demonstrate my its commitment to achieving the increased community use of schools. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr B McCrea: I apologise to Members for not being present for the debate after lunch: I was chairing a meeting of the all-party Assembly group on learning disability.

I thought it important to speak on the amendment proposed by my colleague Mr McNarry, if for no other reason than to demonstrate that Mr McNarry and I work very well together as a united team. There will be a lot of that in the future.

There is something that perhaps Mr McNarry cannot say himself, so I will say it for him: he was the person who first identified this area of opportunity. I listened attentively to Lord Browne, and it is the first time that I have had the chance to listen to one of his speeches in detail. The points that he made were well put and are gratefully received by Members on these Benches. He raised a number of key points, and I was particularly struck by his issue about "Outliers"; about where educational

achievement is found; and about how important it is to get people to engage in academic studies, particularly during the summer months. The Minister could usefully take those points on board.

It took the Minister 10 minutes to tell us what we already know. Her speech was a regurgitation of what we have heard in the past. The important question is: when will she publish the report of the review? Michelle O'Neill mentioned that that has been asked previously, but it was a surprise to discover that the report has been completed. I urge the Minister to bring it forward as a matter of alacrity. This is not a time for naval-gazing or for sitting on one's hands. There are some real issues to be addressed and the situation must be resolved.

I am struck by the key points that were outlined about the terms of reference given to the working group. The Minister asked the authors of the report to consider the barriers to implementation, how to overcome them in a cost-effective manner, and whether they could provide some good examples of best practice. I was somewhat surprised by the examples that she used. The Minister appears a little irked by the fact that someone else is trying to deal with that particular area. Hers seemed to be a rather one-sided approach. Surely, the whole idea is that these are community schools for all communities, including communities on this side of the House? It surprises me that a Minister who is so fixated with equality would not be even-handed in the examples that she brought forward.

I was also struck by the fact that the Minister said in her statement that one size does not fit all. On this side of the House, we agree that there is value in having different approaches. Indeed, it might be an argument that could be deployed in other areas of the education debate. Nevertheless, the most important point is that, in my constituency, and no doubt in others, I am struck by the huge potential of using schools to bring communities together, to engender a sense of community spirit, and to use that space effectively. There is some provision and direction in existing legislation to encourage that, but there is no specific provision to say that it must happen.

We need to find out how to address particular issues. I am mindful of the issue of caretakers, and about who will be around to look after the properties. There is a group called The Talent

Tribe in my constituency that does wonderful work in Poleglass and Twinbrook. It uses a school to teach people about art and drama. Sadly, it looks as if that facility is no longer available to the group. That brings home to me, on a personal basis, the very real lost opportunity.

The Minister has the opportunity to do something. She should recognise the contribution that Mr McNarry has made, as Lord Browne graciously indicated in his opening remarks. We are grateful to him for introducing the matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister please do something about this very important issue?

Mr Storey: I add to the words of congratulation to my colleague Lord Browne for bringing the motion to the Assembly. It is an important issue. I also appreciate the words of Basil McCrea. The motion is in no way intended to circumnavigate the private Member's Bill that was put forward by David McNarry. We will be able to proceed with more clarity as a result of today's debate, although there has been more heat than light from the Minister, which is nothing new. The debate has reignited an important issue, and that is why Lord Browne wanted to bring the issue before the House.

Lord Browne, in his opening comments, and, indeed, other Members, referred to schools being at the heart of communities. That is easy to say, but we must admit, even in light of some of the figures that the Minister gave to the House today, that that is not always how it is seen by schools and communities. Work needs to be done with schools and communities to create a closer working relationship. I will come back to the issue of relationships in a moment or two.

Mr McNarry set out clearly the issues relating to his private Member's Bill. His words were a precursor to the Minister's confirmation that nothing has really been delivered. We have rhetoric, and we have reviews. Indeed, there are probably more reviews in the Department of Education than in any other Department. A review of capital build programmes has been going on since October 2009. The early years strategy goes on and on at a time of crisis for parents in relation to the availability of places in preschool education. However, as Mr McNarry

said, there has, unfortunately, been nothing new from the Department.

Michelle O'Neill raised the important issue of the protection of boards of governors. We need to pay attention to that and take clear guidance on it. In our various roles, we have all served, or serve, on the boards of governors of schools. The ESA Bill is dead, although some Members have not yet realised that it has had a funeral and seem to think that there will somehow be a resurrection if we lay hands upon it. We need to put that idea to bed once again. The ESA Bill contained a proposal to extend the remit of governors and to give them a sense of being community governors. As I mentioned to Dominic Bradley, we need to address how we define "community". Will governors serve all the community or, as is the case at the moment, unfortunately, only part of the community?

John Dallat spoke about after-school activities and raised the relevant issue of adult literacy. We have an ever-growing number of adults who are disenfranchised and distanced from the learning world, and a huge amount of work needs to be done in that regard. Trevor Lunn referred to common sense, but an individual once told me that common sense is not very common. That certainly seems to be the case, given the way in which the Minister has handled this issue and other issues that will increasingly come before the House in the coming weeks and months.

Mr Lunn also raised the issue of insurance, and as my colleague Alastair Ross said, he is well placed to discuss that. That is an issue for boards of governors and the authorities. We must address it practically, but none of the problems is insurmountable. Where there is a will, there is a way. However, from listening to what the Minister said today, I sense that there is little will.

2.45 pm

My colleague Michelle McIlveen referred to the "efficient, effective use of resources", and she gave examples of that. It is scandalous that local authorities are under huge pressure to provide facilities across Northern Ireland when some of those same facilities, and maybe those of a far higher standard, already exist in their areas.

We all desire collaboration between organisations. Let us face reality: there is little

collaboration between organisations such as the education and library boards, local councils and others. The public purse comes as a result of our being a part of the United Kingdom. We will remain part of the United Kingdom for many, many years to come. I have no doubt that my grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren will still be part of the United Kingdom. The money that comes from the British Exchequer needs to be used wisely and in a way that is to the benefit of the citizens of the United Kingdom. That is why we need not only the rhetoric of using better resources more efficiently but the delivery of the more effective and efficient use of resources.

When I intervened in his speech, my colleague Alastair Ross was discussing the provision of facilities in further and higher education colleges. That needs to be looked at, and I encourage Mr McNarry to consider that in his Bill.

Let me turn to the Minister. As Basil McCrea pointed out, the Minister yet again spent 10 minutes rehearsing all that we already know. We got that information through the press, the packs that were provided, our own research, and through the information that Dominic Bradley gave us on behalf of the Education Committee. The Minister has prevaricated because she does not want to deal with the issue. Let us consider the working group. It reported in March. Has the Education Committee ever heard tell of its report? Has it ever been informed that the report was given to the Minister? No. Is there a working relationship between the Minister and the Education Committee? No. Does the Minister want such a working relationship? She does so only when she asks us to beg the Finance Minister for more money on her behalf.

Here we have a Minister who tells the world that she wants to be inclusive. She tells the world that she wants equality and to ensure that all the children are provided for. What does she do when a practical issue that should not be contentious but that should unite the House, and that has already done so in the debate, is brought to her attention? She drags her feet. She prevaricates. She gets a report in March and she sits on it. She would have been better spending her time dealing with the report, because all the time that she spent in South Down was of no benefit to her in the election.

It is quite clear that this Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. I ask him to return to the subject of the motion.

Mr Storey: It is quite clear that this Minister, in dealing with the issue of how — *[Interruption.]* The Minister can sit and laugh and be dismissive, but I assure you that the despicable way in which she runs the Department of Education, not only on this but on every other issue, has caught up with her and will catch up with her. Although she may think that this is something to smirk about, it is not funny when there are serious issues that could be addressed if there was a bit of action from this Minister. Those issues include early years education and the provision of facilities for children by making sure that they have access to other facilities. If there was such action, we would await the outcome.

I welcome the fact that the Minister said that she will talk to other ministerial colleagues. There are issues that concern DEL and other Departments, and everybody needs an opportunity to see whether they can contribute to the delivery of something that is needed in our communities.

I support the motion.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the private Member's Bill, Community Use of School Premises Bill, and the review being undertaken by the Minister of Education into community use of schools; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward, accordingly, a strategy to make the facilities of schools more available for use by local communities at evenings, weekends and during the summer holidays.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise the House that question 2 has been withdrawn.

Environment

Planning Service: Staffing

1. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment how many jobs are likely to be lost as a result of the redeployment of Planning Service staff. (AQO 1203/10)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): The Department and its Planning Service are experiencing a difficult financial position in 2010-11, with a shortfall in the Planning Service budget of more than £8 million. A report has been prepared on how the Planning Service can live within its opening budget allocation. That report identifies 271 posts that are now considered surplus on account of affordability. I have considered the report and released it to the Committee for the Environment, TUS and all staff in the Department.

Today, senior staff from the Department are commencing a series of face-to-face briefings with staff in each Planning Service office. Before the formal process of redeploying staff in the Planning Service can commence, a number of stages must be completed, including consultation with the Committee for the Environment, DFP's corporate HR division, the TUS, affected staff, and other Departments that will be importing DOE staff. Now that I have considered the report prepared by the Department, the process will gain momentum.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service should be able to manage the workforce reductions in the Planning Service without the need for redundancies. Surplus staff will be redeployed to other suitable posts either in the Department, in so far as possible, or in another Department. The NICS has available a range of measures that are being used as required to help to minimise or avoid the need for redundancies.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Along with other members of the Committee for the Environment, I witnessed

a presentation on this matter from Planning Service officials today. The picture that they and the trade union painted was of the Planning Service in crisis. We should be mindful that a fit-for-purpose Planning Service is needed if we are ever to get out of the present economic quagmire. Redeployments will undoubtedly lead to redundancies. Does the Minister recognise that a grave mistake has been made and that, in light of the fact that the decision will result in a Planning Service that is not fit for purpose and will lead to further crises affecting the economic recovery, the decision should be reviewed?

The Minister of the Environment: There is a difference between redeployments and redundancies, and, on Thursday 29 April, when Planning Service staff were protesting about redeployment, it was notable that 200 people in Quinn Insurance had just been told that they were to be made redundant. There is a considerable difference between redeployment and redundancy. My prompt action will, as far as possible, protect staff against redundancy and ensure that people who work in the Northern Ireland Civil Service remain in it with the pay and conditions that they currently enjoy. In very difficult circumstances for all concerned, that is positive for individuals.

Mr Dallat: Of course we accept that there is a difference between redeployment and redundancy, and I wish good luck to the Quinn Insurance people who are losing their jobs. Nevertheless, many people in the Planning Service obtained academic qualifications and have a vocation to do what they do. Given that they are to be redeployed, is the Minister sure that adequate resources remain to ensure that another Audit Office report will not describe the Planning Service as not fit for purpose?

The Minister of the Environment: The Audit Office report was carried out with the staff in place. Consequently, we are seeking to challenge how the Planning Service has been doing things. We are introducing planning reform initiatives, and we want the Planning Service to work smarter than in the past. I have no apologies to make for wanting to drive through an agenda of change in planning, because such an agenda is absolutely necessary.

With respect to individuals with planning expertise who will be redeployed elsewhere, when the economy begins to recover and there is an upturn in planning applications, we intend

to be in a position to offer planning jobs to those who wish to come back.

Therefore, we want to retain them in the Civil Service and to have the opportunity to avail ourselves of their planning skills in the future.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Minister for the fact that we are looking at redeployment as opposed to redundancies. Given that a large number of planning applications are being held up under PPS 21, would bringing forward its review secure at least some of those Planning Service jobs for longer? Will the Minister update Members on why it is taking so long to review PPS 21?

The Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service has a deferred income. The more cases that are cleared, the more income there is — it is a chicken and egg situation. About £4.5 million in deferred income is outstanding.

I put PPS 21 to go before the Executive Committee at the end of last year. It is out of my hands and in the hands of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The First Minister has given it his clearance. The only thing holding back the putting in place of a better planning policy for rural dwellers is the deputy First Minister's office, and he can explain for himself why that is.

Planning Applications

3. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of the target set for the processing of planning applications is currently being met by the Planning Service.
(AQO 1205/10)

The Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service made significant improvement towards achieving public service agreement (PSA) and business plan targets. Statistics that were published for the third quarter up to December 2009 showed that the agency met and exceeded PSA 2011 and 2009-2010 agency business plan targets for processing intermediate applications — 79%, up from 65% in 2008-09. Minor applications stood at 81%, up from 68% in 2008-09. The service achieved 46% towards the major target of 50% of applications determined within 23 weeks, compared to 40.5% at the end of 2008-09. Early indications are that there has been continued improvement in the major category, which should be highlighted in the end-of-year position to be published in July this year.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra.

I thank the Minister for his answer. In light of his earlier answer on the redeployment of staff, does he expect those percentages to increase or decrease as a result of redeployment?

The Minister of the Environment: I expect them to increase. I am demanding better service from the Planning Service because that is what the public demand. I know that staff will be under greater pressure, they will have to work harder and smarter, and all of that. That is what we expect of our public servants. This country is in a financial crisis. We have suffered the consequences of a global downturn. The public sector is not immune from that. Therefore, we must have higher expectations of everyone in the private and the public sector if we are all to see our way through and emerge from that crisis in better shape.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister advise Members whether all statutory agencies, such as the Environment Agency and Roads Service, are now delivering their responses to the Planning Service within the appropriate time frame?

The Minister of the Environment: Both agencies that were mentioned and others have considerably improved, but, in my opinion, they can improve further. So, yes, I will seek to put further pressure on those agencies to respond quicker. To turn the economy around and get the appropriate planning decisions out at an appropriate time, everyone will have to pull their weight including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Roads Service.

Review of Public Administration/Local Government

4. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the review of public administration.
(AQO 1206/10)

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the local government aspects of the review of public administration.
(AQO 1207/10)

12. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the reorganisation of local government.
(AQO 1214/10)

The Minister of the Environment: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I propose to answer questions 4, 5 and 12 together.

I am continuing to take forward the Executive's decision to reshape local government in the most effective and efficient manner possible to create a strong sector that will deliver tangible benefits to ratepayers at no additional cost. At a recent meeting of the strategic leadership board, the local government sector provided me with a good foundation to take forward the creation of a service-delivery model that will provide efficiencies through regional collaboration.

It is through ongoing dialogue with the sector that, I believe, we are making positive inroads towards the reform of local government. I have been speaking to representatives of Executive parties, and, on Thursday, I will put firm proposals to the Executive with options on a way forward to deliver a local government reform programme.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. It is useful to get an update at regular intervals. I am aware that the Minister will put forward proposals at this week's Executive meeting and that he probably does not want to go into much detail on that — I am probably giving him a way out of answering my question — but will he confirm whether next year's local government elections will be contested on the current 26-county model, including the six? *[Laughter]* I thought that I would slip that one in. I meant to say 26-council model. Will the Minister confirm whether next year's local government elections will be contested on the basis of the current local government boundaries or the proposed 11-council model?

The Minister of the Environment: As is the case mathematically, six into 26 does not go, and I am not sure whether I can give away whether 26 into 11 will go on this occasion. A paper is going to the Executive. It is an absolute certainty that local government elections will be held next year. I am very keen to ensure that further powers are vested to local government, where local people can make those decisions, and that we deliver on the collaboration, which will ensure that there are real savings to the public.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is widely expected that the 2011 elections will have to proceed under the old boundaries. As the Minister well knows, those date back to 1992 and are well out of date. How can the Minister justify that under the principle of equality of votes in many constituencies?

The Minister of the Environment: Those boundaries are a matter for the Northern Ireland Office, so the question should be referred to the Northern Ireland Office Minister. Now that the Alliance Party has a Member of Parliament, it has the facility to do that.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his response. I was interested to hear him say that the results of the review of public administration would be a tangible benefit to ratepayers with no additional cost. I sat in on today's meeting of the Environment Committee, and we heard about the Planning Service and the difficulties that it faces with regard to income, trying to balance the books and the redeployment of staff. Can the Minister assure the House that there will be no extra costs as a consequence of the transition from the Planning Service to the new councils as part of the review of public administration?

The Minister of the Environment: That is exactly the case. We have to live within our means, and if we are going to transfer powers to local government, those powers have to be transferred with an appropriate and applicable budget. If we are to transfer, as is my intention, the budget to support the numbers of staff whom we are transferring does not exist. Immediately, therefore, we would have been imposing an additional tax on the hard-pressed ratepayers across Northern Ireland and in every individual council. That is not something that I am prepared to do. If I am to transfer the Planning Service to local authorities, I will seek to meet the costs of that transfer, as they currently exist, and to do so within my budget.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will recognise that the staff are an important part of any change in the review of public administration and that there has been uncertainty up to now as to whether there will be 11 or 26 councils. Will the Minister give an assurance that the staff will be informed as early as possible of whether there will be 11 or 26? Will he also detail what the work of transition committees will be if the 26-council model is maintained?

3.15 pm

The Minister of the Environment: As soon as the Executive agree the way forward, the councils and their staff will be informed. I recognise that the period of flux has been

somewhat unfair on council staff, many of whom are very good hard-working people. It is important that they are shown the proper degree of courtesy and respect and are made aware of the decisions on staffing as soon as possible.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to the planners, and I am interested in how people with that specialised skill set could be transplanted into other clerical or administrative jobs. He may or may not wish to answer that.

Given that the Executive have been unable to agree the boundaries in time, how can the Minister justify the cost of the RPA to date? What is the Minister's best estimate of whether there will be 11 or 26 councils next year?

The Minister of the Environment: The Department is seeking to deliver savings, and if those savings cannot be delivered, the cost expended thus far cannot be justified. However, I am determined that the Department will deliver savings. I am pressing, pressing and pressing again on that, because if those savings are not delivered, the Department will have failed. The Department must deliver savings, and that is something that I intend to force. It is a simple equation: if the savings can be delivered, the costs will be justified.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has already been answered.

DOE: Legislative Programme

6. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's legislative programme for the remainder of this Assembly mandate. (AQO 1208/10)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has four Bills going through the Assembly: the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill; the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill; the Local Government (Finance) Bill; and the High Hedges Bill. I plan to bring three further Bills to the Assembly before the end of the current mandate: a planning reform Bill, a local government reorganisation Bill and the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. My Department also has an extensive programme of subordinate legislation that will be made during this mandate.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he update the House on the current position on the change to boundaries?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member's supplementary question is perhaps more relevant to the previous question. If we are to change the boundaries, a local government boundaries Order must be introduced to give effect to new government districts. Subsequent to Executive agreement on boundary changes, the Department can proceed to do whatever is necessary thereafter.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Minister's intention to bring forward those Bills. Will he outline which, if any, of those Bills are held up in the Executive, at what stage they are being held up and why?

The Minister of the Environment: The Bill to reorganise local government is the only one that is being held up. Several issues raised by the deputy First Minister's office have not allowed it to proceed. If we were to proceed with the 11-council model, that is one of the Bills that would be absolutely necessary.

Planning Service: Staffing

7. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment what consultation was undertaken by his Department on the potential redeployment of 269 Planning Service staff.

(AQO 1209/10)

The Minister of the Environment: Several stages remain to be completed before the formal process of redeploying staff from the Planning Service can commence. One such stage will be the consultation with the Committee for the Environment, the corporate HR division of the Department of Finance and Personnel, the trade unions, the staff affected and the other Departments that will import Department of the Environment staff. Now that I have considered the report prepared by the Department, the process will gain momentum.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister assure the House that those who are redeployed will be given work that matches their skill sets and that all aspects of equality law will be followed?

The Minister of the Environment: All aspects of equality law will be followed. It will be interesting, and surprising, for many to discover the skills that Planning Service staff possess in addition to their degrees in planning. Redeployment can be a good experience for many people, as it widens their skill set and

offers them a new and different perspective. When the Department is in a position to bring many of those people back to the Planning Service, they will return with an even better skill set. They will have had a completely new experience, which would not have happened had they remained in the Planning Service for their entire Civil Service careers.

Mr McNarry: The issue concerns my constituency of Strangford, so I would be grateful if the Minister could explain the thinking behind workforce planning in the Planning Service. It was recruiting staff until August 2009, but it now requires a reduction in staffing of one third. He will appreciate that that is causing great concerns.

The Minister of the Environment: When I became Minister in July 2009, I became aware of financial issues in the Department. One of the early decisions was to freeze Civil Service recruitment. Previously, positions that became vacant were filled. We have not been filling positions from August 2009, otherwise we would be in a more difficult situation than at present. Nonetheless, despite the effects of the downturn, finance had come into the Department from earlier applications, and there was a stream of work. At the peak two years ago, 36,000 planning applications were in the system, and that figure has now been reduced to 20,000, so a fair amount of backlog work has been cleared up. We now need to address the difficult issues and make difficult decisions. I have worked on that since I came into office.

Mr Bell: The public can understand that a reduction from 36,000 planning applications to 20,000 means that action is needed, but I appreciate that the situation is causing much personal pain to a number of planners and administrative staff. Let us hope that the economy picks up and the number of planning applications rises again, because the construction industry needs them. If and when that occurs, can the Minister assure the House that the people who have been redeployed can come back to the Planning Service as a priority, thereby not only retaining their employment but boosting the Northern Ireland economy?

The Minister of the Environment: I trust that, within the next year, responsibility for almost all planning decisions will rest with local authorities. I expect that, as the workload rises, Planning Service will take on further numbers of staff. We are in an economic decline, but

we could be on the cusp of turning the corner. One simply does not know. When that corner is turned and planning applications start to be made in greater numbers, I have no doubt that many of those people will be redeployed in planning. The councils will be keen to get people with a particular skill set and with particular experience to help to ensure the delivery of smooth planning in council areas.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. If the redeployment of staff in the Planning Service were to lead to the local office in my constituency being closed, it would cause great inconvenience. Will the Minister make every effort to retain staff in local offices such as the one in Enniskillen, rather than inconveniencing councillors by requiring them to go to Omagh, as has happened with many job redeployments in the past?

The Minister of the Environment: At this time, there are no plans to close local offices. We are carrying out a staff redeployment, and the offices will remain intact for the foreseeable future. If the requirement to make further savings were to arise, we would have to make further decisions on how to arrive at those savings. Closing offices is not currently one of those decisions.

Planning Service: Staffing

8. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the staffing requirements within the Planning Service and when staff will have clarity as to their future prospects. (AQO 1210/10)

The Minister of the Environment: In 2010-11, the Department and its Planning Service experienced the difficult financial position of a shortfall in the Planning Service budget of over £8 million. A report is now being prepared on whether the Planning Service can live within its opening budget allocation. The report has identified 270 posts that are now considered surplus from the point of view of affordability. I have considered the report, and I hope to release it to all the staff in the Department in the near future. Thereafter, senior staff in the Department will embark on a series of brief meetings with staff in each Planning Service office.

Mr Beggs: There has been a reduction in planning applications since the end of the

property boom in 2007. The Minister has said already today that he has noticed the Planning Service workforce and finance crisis since coming into office. Does he accept that his predecessor, in failing to workforce-plan, created a crisis not only for existing staff but turmoil for staff who have been newly recruited and additional, unnecessary HR costs? Does he agree that it would have been much better to have managed staffing during that entire period rather than to have reached the crisis point of today, where one third of staff may be redeployed?

The Minister of the Environment: A considerable number of planning applications were in the system. Had we moved to redeploy staff earlier, we would not have been in the position in which, as I told Mr McCartney, we had a much better response time than was previously the case. The fact that more planning officers have been in post than there have been applications lodged has helped us to deal with the considerable backlog. That backlog has now been dealt with. The financial circumstances are such that we move on. The previous Minister received a ringing endorsement from the public last week, and I cannot take that away.

Road Safety: Drivers over 70

9. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to improve road safety awareness among drivers aged 70 years and over. (AQO 1211/10)

The Minister of the Environment: I am consulting on the development of a new road safety strategy for Northern Ireland, and I recognise that we cannot afford to lose sight of older people, who are among our most vulnerable road users. Over the lifetime of the new road safety strategy, the population of Northern Ireland is projected to increase from around 1.8 million in 2010 to 1.9 million by 2020, and the age profile of the population will gradually become older. The safety of older people is likely to have increasing importance to the delivery of the new strategy's objectives. We propose, therefore, to consider how we can work with partners, including the wider voluntary and community sector, to understand better the cause of collisions involving older people and develop strategies to tackle them.

Furthermore, proposed measures in the strategy, such as improvements in road

markings, signage and infrastructure, and the wider use of 20 miles per hour zones, will positively improve road safety for all road users, including older people.

I urge all those with an interest in road safety, including those who represent the interests of older road users, to consider the consultation document carefully and, in responding to the Department, to give us their views and practical proposals as to how we can make a positive contribution to the way forward for road safety. We will continue our intelligence-led, high-profile approach to addressing and improving road users' behaviours, attitudes and awareness through road safety campaigns that focus on the main dangerous behaviours that lead to serious injuries and death. We will continue to ensure that all road users receive appropriate messages about such behaviours.

Mr Bresland: Will the Minister consider the merits of a refresher course on safe motoring just before a driver reaches 70 years of age?

The Minister of the Environment: We will certainly give the suggestion consideration. However, drivers in the 70-plus category are not responsible for a large number of the accidents or deaths on our roads. Therefore, I do not want to target people in a way that may be deemed as persecuting them or making them less equal than others. Many older people may drive a little slower, but normally they drive very carefully. However, I will look at the matter, particularly in the light of road accident statistics, to ensure that all target groups are met.

Road Safety Strategy

10. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the potential savings if his Department meets the targets set out in the draft road safety strategy.

(AQO 1212/10)

The Minister of the Environment: The consultation on preparing a new road safety strategy for Northern Ireland was launched on 16 March 2010 and includes proposed targets for casualty reductions by 2020. Those targets will be measured against the average annual number of deaths and serious injuries between 2004 and 2008 of 126 and 1,111 respectively. If the first strategic target to reduce the number of people killed on our roads by at least 40% is adopted and achieved, it is estimated that

by 2020 the annual number of road deaths will have fallen to around 76. Thus, by 2020, approximately 50 fewer people will die on our roads each year.

It is estimated that, if the second target to reduce the number of people seriously injured on our roads by at least 45% is adopted and achieved, by 2020 the annual number of serious injuries will have fallen to around 611. That means that, by 2020, approximately 500 fewer people will be seriously injured on our roads each year.

3.30 pm

Detailed calculations, with estimated savings in each intervening year, are being prepared for inclusion in the final strategy. However, if the new targets are adopted and achieved, approximately 275 deaths and 2,750 serious injuries will be avoided over the period of the new strategy. It is a sad reality that, even though we are focusing on saving lives and reducing human suffering, we must also talk in money terms. The latest estimation indicates that, if the proposed new targets were achieved, the financial saving would be around £938 million. Please note that that figure is calculated using today's valuations for deaths and serious injuries and does not include slight injuries, which could take the total to well over £1 billion. I must stress that the forecasted values cannot allow for unforeseen developments and are based on the assumption that the conditions that have brought about casualty reductions to date will continue in the coming years. It must also be emphasised that predicted reductions will only be achieved by continuing efforts to improve road safety and that they are in no sense predestined.

Assembly Commission

Speaker: US Visit

1. **Mr McGlone** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the overall cost of the visit by the Speaker and staff to America for St Patrick's Day 2010, including travel, accommodation and other expenses. (AQO 1218/10)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: The total cost of the visit to Washington by the Speaker, the Clerk/Director General and the adviser to the Speaker

for the St Patrick's Day celebrations was £6,294.99.

Mr McGlone: Are there any additional or further benefits by way of return visits, or were any further details discussed in relation to twinning projects that might be useful for this Parliament?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: The support that we in Northern Ireland have received from the United States over many years and from several Administrations has been instrumental in developing a better future for Northern Ireland, politically, economically and socially. Maintaining strong links with America, including participation in events such as those, is crucial for the benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland. With that in mind, the Speaker formally launched the Assembly all-party USA group during his visit to Washington DC, with the stated aim of increasing engagement and understanding on issues of political, economic, social, cultural and educational interest for our people.

Stormont Estate: Newtownards Road Entrance

2. **Mr Leonard** asked the Assembly Commission what consideration it has given to opening the entrance at the main gates to the Stormont estate on the Newtownards Road before 8.00am. (AQO 1219/10)

Mr Neeson: The opening hours for the three entrances to Stormont estate are as follows: Prince of Wales Avenue, Newtownards Road, is open Monday to Friday, 7.45 am to 6.00 pm, and on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays, it is closed to traffic; the Massey Avenue gates are open all day, every day for vehicular traffic on business; the Stoney Road entrance is open Monday to Friday, 7.00 am to 6.30 pm, and on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays, it is closed to traffic. All gates to the Stormont estate are directly managed, controlled and staffed by DFR, and the Assembly Commission has no jurisdiction in the matter whatsoever.

Mr Leonard: I thank the Member for the comprehensive nature of his answer to that important question. On a slightly different subject matter, has the Commission entered into any negotiations with the estate owners with a view to increasing the space available for car parking for Assembly workers?

Mr Neeson: There is a question on car parking later, and I will deal with the issue at that stage. At present, the Assembly Commission does not have any direct influence on the opening times for the gates. However, should a definitive business need or operational requirement to change those times be identified, it could be explored further with DFP through the Office of the Keeper.

Mr Beggs: The question appears to be seeking additional hours for the opening of an additional gate. Does the Commission agree that politicians must be mindful of money that they spend to confer honours on themselves so that money is available to improve services to the public?

Mr Neeson: Finance is very important, but, as I said earlier, the issue is under the control of DFP. However, the very fact that the Massey Avenue gate is open all day every day means that there is continuous access to the grounds.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

North/South Parliamentary Forum

4. **Ms Purvis** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the establishment of a North/South parliamentary forum. (AQO 1221/10)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Members may be aware that references to the establishment of a joint parliamentary forum involving the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas were made in both the Belfast Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. Since the restoration of the Assembly in May 2007, the issue has been raised with and by the Speaker on a number of occasions and has been the subject of discussions between the Speaker and the leaders of all political parties represented in the Assembly.

Building on those discussions and other discussions between the Commissions of the Assembly and the Oireachtas, the Speaker and Ceann Comhairle agreed to establish two working groups to develop proposals for such a body. The working groups have held a number of meetings independently. Additionally, officials from both legislatures have met to consider the wider operational requirements for a forum.

Both working groups met in the Dáil in November 2009. At that meeting it was agreed to convene a conference in autumn 2010 to

further assist in progressing the establishment of the North/South parliamentary forum.

Ms Purvis: I thank Reverend Coulter for his answer. I welcome the fact that there is going to be a conference in the autumn. I urge the Commission to push ahead on the issue. The only way to secure the Union is to have good relationships with our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland. It is a recognition of partition and of this devolved institution, and I encourage the Commission and the Speaker to move ahead with the establishment of the forum as quickly as possible.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: It goes without saying that we are looking forward to the forum holding its first meeting, and it is anticipated that it will meet in December 2010 or in January 2011.

Mr McNarry: What are the staffing and cost implications of a North/South parliamentary forum?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I do not have those figures to hand, but I will ensure that the Member receives them at an early date.

Assembly Staff: Pay and Grading

5. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the review of pay and grading of Assembly staff. (AQO 1222/10)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member on behalf of the Commission for his question. Members will all agree that staff are entitled to proper pay and conditions. The first stage of a review of pay and grading, which involved a systematic evaluation of all posts within the Assembly secretariat, has now been completed. That work was undertaken by members of staff from the Scottish Parliament. As a new member of the Commission, I have enquired to ensure that that exercise was fit for purpose.

The methodology used in respect of that exercise was not cheap. It had previously been purchased by the Commission in respect of a previous grading exercise and cost £127,000. It is now intended that a bespoke grading structure for the secretariat will be developed. In addition, a pay benchmarking exercise will be completed. That exercise has been tendered for, and the tender has been awarded at a cost of £45,400. Proposals for grading and pay will then be brought to the Assembly Commission later in the year.

Mr O'Loan: I agree that our staff should have proper pay and conditions, and to that extent I welcome the review. Does the Member have any further comments to make on the actual review process? Can he tell us what the cost implications are in relation to salary outcomes and how those cost implications are being provided for?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Everybody agrees that human resources are a critical part of the Assembly Commission's work. Staff are a highly valuable asset. In the past, I have raised various issues about staff management. I reassure the Member that, as long as I am on the Commission, the proper treatment of staff will be a priority for me and the Commission and that the processes around the treatment of staff will be as good as they can get.

There are differentials between the Assembly's pay and grading and that of other parliamentary bodies on these islands, and there may be some cost consequences for the Assembly Commission once the pay and grading exercise is complete. However, it would be premature to draw that conclusion at this stage. We will not know the full cost follow-through for members of staff in the Building until the exercise is complete.

Assembly Committees: Paper Use

6. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Assembly Commission what steps will be taken to reduce the amount of paper used in Assembly Committee packs. (AQO 1223/10)

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Assembly Commission recognises the need to reduce the Assembly's impact on the environment. The amount of paper used in the Assembly has been identified as an area where improvements need to be made. Members may be aware that the Assembly Commission recently endorsed a three-year sustainable development strategy with a supporting action plan, a key theme of which is environmental impact reduction.

In an effort to reduce the amount of paper used in Assembly Committee packs, Committee meeting papers are printed and/or photocopied double-sided. In addition, larger documents are either summarised or provided electronically in the vast majority of cases. Committee meeting

papers are also available electronically for Committee members on request. The files and subject dividers of any returned Committee meeting packs are reused, and the paper is recycled.

The main initiative under consideration to reduce further the amount of paper used is the use of e-readers to enable Committee members to view Committee packs electronically. A pilot study on the use of e-reader technology in the Assembly was undertaken in 2009. Although it was recognised that the use of e-readers had potential, difficulties were encountered with the then commercially available equipment. The Information Systems Office, on behalf of the Assembly Commission, continues to review technological advances in the emerging e-reader market, and it is hopeful that an enhanced e-reader will become available that could be trialled at a later date. The successful introduction of an effective user-friendly e-reader would significantly reduce the amount of paper used in Assembly Committee packs.

Mr McDevitt: I am happy with that answer.

Legislation

7. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Assembly Commission whether there will be adequate capacity in the Assembly to manage a potential significant increase in the number of Bills tabled before and after summer recess 2010. (AQO 1224/10)

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On a number of occasions, the Assembly Commission has been briefed on the potential for a significant increase in the number of Bills introduced in the Assembly. The Commission was also briefed on the potential operational impacts of a heavy programme and on actions being taken by the secretariat to ensure that effective arrangements are in place to support the whole process. The secretariat has, for example, emphasised to Departments the importance of introducing Bills as early as possible in the final year of the mandate of this Assembly. Committee Chairpersons have also been encouraged to engage with Departments about priorities and the handling of Bills.

The most immediate impact of the heavy programme of work will be on the Committee Office, the Bill Office and the Legal Services Unit. However, there is also likely to be a significant increase in the demand for Hansard

services for Committee meetings and plenary sittings. A heavy work programme is also likely to place additional demands on Assembly Members in Committee and plenary sessions. To date, the additional workload has been managed mainly through reviewing priorities in the relevant offices. However, monthly updates on the programme of work and any associated resource issues have been requested. On the basis of those updates, the Commission will ensure that action is taken to provide the necessary resources to support the Assembly in its role as a legislature.

3.45 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I thank Mr Doherty for his response. Will he indicate how many Bills are in the process of being brought before the Assembly? We all know that Bills have been held up at Executive level, including some difficult legislation around parades and public processions.

When the Member refers to resources, what resources does he mean? We know that the Bill Office already works very hard and is very efficient. However, the majority of resources are human resources. Therefore, are there any plans to recruit new staff for that office?

Mr Doherty: It is not possible to be absolutely definitive as to how many Bills will be introduced, as it is for the Executive and Members to make the final decisions on whether individual Bills are introduced during this mandate. However, based on its ongoing liaison with departmental officials, the Bill Office estimates that it is possible that a further 20 to 25 Executive Bills could be introduced in the coming months. It is also likely that a number of private Members' Bills and Committee Bills will be introduced.

The Commission is satisfied that the staff currently employed in the secretariat have the necessary skills and experience to support the effective scrutiny of the Bills that are likely to be introduced during the remainder of the mandate. As I said, monthly updates are produced on the programme of work and any associated resource issues. Based on those updates, the Commission will ensure that action is taken to provide whatever resources are necessary to support the Assembly in its role as a legislature.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the Members are not in their places to ask questions 8 and 9, we will move on to the next item of business.

Private Members' Business

I CAN Centre

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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Shannon: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to arrange urgent discussions to secure funding for the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch that will ensure the long-term future of this vital facility.

This is a very important motion for a great many Members, their constituencies and for the work that the centre does in the area. I will start by reading a section from the South Eastern Education and Library Board's website, as it seems to me that it knows best what exactly the I CAN centre does and how essential it is to the early years development of many children:

"The I CAN Early Years Centre at Ballynahinch Primary School was opened in November 2000 as a response to the high prevalence rates and lack of early intervention services for children with speech, language and communication difficulties. It is a partnership between the South Eastern Education and Library Board, the former Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust (now the South East Trust) and I CAN, the national charity for children with speech, language and communication difficulties. It was the first I CAN centre to open in N Ireland. Funding for the centre in the initial 2 years was provided by I CAN. Thereafter funding for the teacher, classroom assistant and secretarial support has been provided by the South Eastern Education and Library Board, while Down Lisburn Trust funded the speech and language therapist. In the Down Lisburn Trust area research shows that up to 42% of pre-school children present with speech, language and communication difficulties. Research also shows that one of the best predictors of success at school is effective communication skills."

A press release from the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) stated:

"We know how important it is that children with speech and language difficulties receive the right

kind of support as early as possible in order to enhance their opportunities for success at school."

It went on to state that the centre:

"is staffed by a full-time teacher, a speech and language therapist and a special needs classroom assistant. It provides a minimum of 20 places each year for pre-school children with speech, language and communication difficulties who reside in the former Down Lisburn Trust area as well as an extensive outreach service for nursery age children throughout the area."

Mr Bell: I thank the Member for pointing out those facts. Does he agree that early intervention leads to less cost in the provision of future services and less cost to the economy? I am sure that all Members here agree with that, particularly my colleague Michelle McIlveen, who is a qualified teacher. The research and evidence base confirms that, if money can be front-loaded into early years provision, money will be saved later on. Therefore, in this case, a short-term cut would, ultimately, be penny wise but pound foolish.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his intervention. As I will outline later, that is one of the issues that we hit upon. It is better to spend £85,000 now than to spend £170,000 later.

Mr Doug Osler, the chairman of the SEELB commissioners, said that the I CAN centre is an excellent example of the benefits of early intervention for children with special needs. Evaluations show that in a substantial number of cases, children's understanding of language has significantly improved following a year of support at the centre.

The centre as well clearly shows the importance of good effective working in the partnership between education and health in making sure the best outcomes for children. We are keen to see more services of this nature being put in place, and we are currently looking at how resources might be used far better for early intervention work.

Doug Osler, the chairman of the SEELB commissioners, said:

"The I CAN Centre is an excellent example of the benefits of early intervention for children with special needs. Evaluations show that, in a substantial number of cases, children's understanding of language has significantly improved following a year of support at the Centre."

The Centre also clearly demonstrates the importance of effective collaboration between education and health in ensuring the best outcomes for children. We are keen to see more services of this nature being provided and are currently looking at how resources might be used more effectively for early intervention work."

He clearly recognised the need for the centre and said that funding for it was money well spent.

I will stop reading the press release, which seems purpose-written for the occasion and ask what has changed. We are all asking that question. Does the board have any less of a duty to special needs children? Not according to the DENI website, which states that:

"the statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs rests with the Education and Library Boards and Boards of Governors of mainstream schools."

No change there then. Has policy changed so that nursery education and early years is now not seen as the best stage for intervention? Not according to the chief inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate, Stanley Goudie, who highlighted its importance in his report on the importance of early years provision, 'An Evaluation of the Quality of Educational Provision in Nursery Units in Primary Schools 2007–2009'. At the launch of that report, he said:

"There is a growing body of research, at international level, which emphasises the importance of early years. The right interventions early in life can help to reduce barriers to learning that may, otherwise, reduce children's longer term chances of success."

Therefore, there is still a need for early intervention, and the evidence clearly supports that.

Has something changed? Is the I CAN centre no longer value for money? It certainly still is. Seventy per cent of the children who attend the centre are able to go into mainstream schooling. All of that is provided for a small budget of £85,000, which includes three wages and the running costs of the centre in Ballynahinch Primary School. Not only does the centre cater for 20 children, but the staff go out to playgroups, nursery schools and P1 classes to deliver a service that no one can say is not real value for money. Similarly, no one can say that the centre is not providing savings for the SEELB in the cost of long-term care for those children.

If the issue is savings, will someone tell me where they are? As my colleague Jonathan Bell said, there will be larger costs later on. The educational contribution is £85,000, which is true value for money. Any closure would cost the SEELB three times the good value that they get at present. Therefore, the £85,000 cost, which includes staff wages and an office, is a bargain. It is hard to express the difference that the centre has made to the lives of children who need a little bit extra help and stimulation. They get that in abundance at the centre.

Any closure of the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch would be a false economy. Although the chief executive of the board has suggested that he has to make efficiency savings, any closure will entail considerable costs — two or three times those at present — because the children would have to have their needs catered for in mainstream schools. That would require a personal classroom assistant for each child and additional attention from the teacher, which would be to the detriment of others in the class. Therefore, you take them out of the I CAN centre and put them into mainstream education, which costs more in staffing and effort. Ultimately, that does not help the child either, and it is important that we focus on the children and their needs. Indeed, the suggestion of any closure is preposterous, because £85,000 for the I CAN centre will become £170,000-plus as a result. The Departments will spend literally thousands of pounds more by not running the centre, and where is the efficiency saving in that?

What has changed? Is the I CAN centre no longer making a difference? Well, it makes a big difference. I highlighted the education board's view and costings. It is now time to get to the most important matter, namely the difference that the centre makes to individual children. When I met the chief executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board and some parents of children who attend the I CAN centre two or three months ago, the most telling point was a three-minute video that one parent brought along to show us. That mother was in the great hall in Parliament Buildings just last week, and her wee boy has done exceptionally well. That was all because the teachers at the I CAN centre did their work and did it well.

The video showed the child when he was unable to speak. In the space of seven months at the I CAN centre, that wee boy learned not only to speak but to sing. The song that he sang that

day was 'You are my Sunshine'. His grasp of the words was truly fantastic, and my colleague Michelle McIlveen and I had the opportunity to meet the mother and young child last week. The child poignantly said to Mr Stanton Sloan of the South Eastern Education and Library Board, "Please don't take my sunshine away" and asked him to give the I CAN centre the necessary moneys. Very clearly, therefore, we put the ball at the toe of Stanton Sloan, but we also have to put the ball very clearly at the feet of the commissioners.

That young boy is simply one example of the lives that are changed every day. Children with no voice come out singing. If that is not an encouragement and reason for this debate, I would like to know what is. I have been inundated with calls from the parents of children who attend or have the prospect of attending the I CAN centre who are devastated by the thought that it will no longer operate. On their behalf and on behalf of the children who have no voice to speak for themselves, I ask for the funding to be made available. I ask for the I CAN centre to be there for the children who will need it in the next few years and in the years to come. One parent said to me that he finds it difficult to see so much money being spent teaching children French and German. Those are his words. That is not to say that we should not learn to speak French and German, yet his child cannot find the funding to be helped to speak, full stop.

I urge the Minister of Education and the Health Minister, who also has a role to play, to save themselves money in the long term. More importantly, I urge them to allow that life-changing centre — that is what it does for young children: it changes their lives, gives them opportunity and ensures that they can cope in class — to continue to help children, who need just that little bit more specialist help to reach their potential.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and I am happy to be part of this cross-party effort to highlight not only the issue that has come to the fore but the positive aspects and programme that the I CAN centre provides.

Jim being Jim, he has covered a lot of the statistics, so I do not propose to repeat them. Can I just take this opportunity to congratulate Jim on his recent election success? I do not

know whether your party policy says that you will be leaving here, but, if you are, you will be a loss, because you bring a lot of common sense to some of these debates. Congratulations anyway.

The motion can and should be supported by the House as a whole, because all that it asks is that the Education Minister and Health Minister get together to try to find a way forward for that vital service. I welcome the Education Minister to the debate. I have to say once again, however, that I am disappointed that the Health Minister has failed to show up. That just sends out a clear message that it seems that every Tuesday in the Assembly, with a few exceptions, the Health Minister does not weigh in. Is he telling us that he is so important and busy that he cannot give up an hour and a half of his time to attend the debate and listen to the concerns? The motion is directed at health as well as education. He should listen to Members' concerns, because we are asking for collective responsibility and a collective approach to the issues.

4.00 pm

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

As Jim said, the I CAN centre is a children's charity that wants to ensure that no child is left behind because of a difficulty in speaking or understanding. I thank the Assembly's Research and Library Service for the useful information that it provided for the debate; some of the issues jump out of it even though we are probably already aware of them. Communication difficulties are life-limiting, and a child who struggles to speak will find it hard to read, write and make friends.

Reading the research made me think of the Programme for Government, and I read through some of the issues mentioned in its introduction. The Executive stated:

"We are determined that everyone, including the most vulnerable within our society, will have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from increased prosperity."

I know that we are not talking about the economy, but unless we have people who can deal with issues relating to the economy, there will be no change. Unless we stand up and be counted and ensure that the most vulnerable are given all available opportunities, there is an issue.

The Executive's principles, as set out in the Programme for Government, include working in the interests of everyone and working in partnership. The I CAN centre shows that partnership works. However, everyone needs to step up to the mark and be an equal partner. The motion highlights the need to take responsibility, and as I have said in numerous debates in the Assembly, society will be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable. Unless we can make a difference and show that the Assembly is making, and continues to make, a difference in people's lives, we have questions to answer.

I am a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning. In my former role as Chairperson of that Committee, I pushed for an inquiry into young people who are not in employment, education or training, and more than 52,000 young people are not in any of those sectors. Jonathan Bell's point is relevant: unless we invest now, it will cost us millions and we will have to pick up the pieces later in life. We cannot be penny wise and pound foolish.

I am conscious of my time, and I want to mention a few other issues. I am disappointed that the Health Minister is not here. Perhaps Ulster Unionist Members can tell us why. I look forward to the Minister of Education's contribution, because I noticed in the information that we were given that she had written to the Health Minister, and we will be able to find out whether she has received a response. I am glad that Margaret Ritchie is here, albeit as a private Member.

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

Ms S Ramsey: I hope that she can highlight, through DSD's policies of empowering and supporting communities, how collective responsibility can be brought to the fore so that we can secure and save the I CAN initiative. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCallister: I declare an interest. My wife is a nursery school teacher and has been on a course at the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch.

I support the centre's work. I will make it clear to Ms Ramsey why the Health Minister is not here: no one is in any doubt that this is an education matter. The Health Minister asked me to relay the message that the Health Service's speech and language therapists stand ready

to do the job, and it is up to the Minister of Education to keep the I CAN centre in place. I want to express my disappointment in her failure to find the funding for that life-changing resource.

The health trust and the Minister made it clear that they would assist funding for one year. The Minister of Education's comments last week were rather strange, in that she was trying to blame the Health Minister. That is simply irresponsible and ludicrous. This is an education matter. Maybe we need to look at other Executive funds to see how best to deal with this type of issue when it arises.

The Health Minister has fulfilled his commitment on the health obligations of the unit, and is waiting for the Minister of Education to fulfil her teaching obligations. The SEELB has the lead responsibility to ensure the funding for education staff. As such, the lack of a funding commitment of £85,000 is the direct responsibility of the Minister of Education. However, she has appeared to take a swipe at the education board, claiming that she has responsibility only for policy decisions and not for any resulting actions. That is symptomatic of the Minister of Education. I am disappointed that she is refusing to put children first yet again.

In response to a question tabled in May 2009, the Minister stated that her Department's:

"remit on special education extends to the development of strategy and policy and not to operational delivery ... DE has no role in directing ELBs as to how they determine the specific provision required to meet local needs."

Neglecting those children will have a massive negative impact on their future. There will be a cost to those children as individuals and as families, and to our whole nation. As Mr Shannon quite rightly pointed out, early intervention is key in many of these cases. Unfortunately, we are still waiting for the Minister to bring forward her nought-to-six strategy. We need to up our game and improve those services at a much earlier stage.

The refusal to grant funding to the centre is a false economy. It will distort life chances for those children long into the future. It will also do untold longer-term damage to the public purse. That is the focus. Ms Ramsey used the phrase "penny wise and pound foolish". That is what the Minister is being.

Mr B McCrea: We are together on this issue, so for the sake of being positive, will the Member confirm that the Health Minister is prepared and willing to play his part, and that he is looking for reciprocation from other people?

Mr McCallister: I am happy to give that confirmation. It is important that that be reiterated. The Health Minister is absolutely committed to this. Let us hope that, after the debate, the Minister of Education shares that commitment.

The Education Minister should not only ensure that funding is allocated for this year, she should also grant a long-term funding assurance to this important service. The I CAN centre represents significant cost savings on educational and psychological assessment, a social communication unit, replacement classrooms, assistant support and outreach teacher support. I say to the Minister of Education that we do not want a short-sighted, short-term solution. That would create longer-term, lifelong problems for those children.

As my colleague pointed out, the House has united to speak strongly in support of an excellent centre. Early intervention is exactly the type of programme that we should be encouraging. We should not let the Education Minister close it down.

Ms Ritchie: I support the cross-party motion. The I CAN centre is based in Ballynahinch and is more commonly known as Croob Park Primary School. It has been an important resource for preschool children since 2000, when it started as a pilot project. It helps children with speech and language difficulties in their formative preschool years. It is a dedicated facility that helps many young children right across the South Eastern Board area and in small communities in my constituency such as Kilcoo, Downpatrick and Drumaness. I have met many of the young families who have benefited considerably.

Funding provision has been uncertain for several years, and I recall being involved in representations to the Health Department and, in particular, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and, formerly, the Down Lisburn Trust to provide enhanced funding to keep this important centre going.

The I CAN centre provides an innovative and integrated approach to the development of

speech and language services for children who have difficulties. There is absolutely no doubt that the children who benefit from the facility are able to go into mainstream education with a high degree of confidence, having had their problems rectified and remedied. I found the service to be quite remarkable, and given the benefits that are derived from it, it is important that it is allowed to continue.

There has been a considerable debacle over the past number of weeks. Much of that debacle has been relayed in the local press in Down, and many of us who represent South Down have been party to those stories. Clarity must be provided on where responsibility lies. Like Mr McCallister, I understand that the Health Department is prepared to provide its component of funding for speech and language services. Indeed, the Minister stated that quite clearly in last week's 'Down Recorder'; I think that the statement was given at 4.55 pm.

The Minister of Education must now provide certainty and clarity about the funding to enable the service to continue so that it can affect goodness and improvement and ensure that the children in Down receive a service to which they are entitled and from which many of them have already benefited. It must be ensured that the provision for the 20 children who are at the centre is able to continue and that others who badly need the provision can benefit from the innovative approach.

I CAN outlines its purpose as follows:

"We are here to ensure that no child is left out or left behind because of a difficulty speaking or understanding. Nobody wants a child's potential to be wasted. It happens because communication difficulties are not visible, often mistaken for something else, or not noticed at all."

As a collective Assembly, we must ensure that there is one clear message that we will not allow the service to be abandoned, undermined or lost. My message is plain and simple: the money must be found to allow the continued funding of the I CAN centre. I ask both Ministers concerned to have ongoing discussions to ensure the continuation of the much needed facility at Ballynahinch Primary School, commonly known as Croob Park Primary School.

Mr Lunn: I could understand the dilemma if we were talking about £850,000 or £185,000. However, given that we are talking about only

£85,000, one begins to wonder what is going on. I do not want to repeat what other Members have said. The benefit of the centre is so obvious that it does not need to be repeated, but I will do so anyway.

The I CAN centre has 20 pupils. I understand that, on average, about 14 of those pupils are able to transfer into mainstream education at primary 1 level because of the treatment and training that they receive at the I CAN centre. If they were not able to do that, as Jim Shannon and Jonathan Bell rightly pointed out, the extra cost to the system in years to come would be enormous compared with the £85,000 that we are talking about. It is beyond me how such a centre can be run for £85,000, but, apparently, it can. The cost benefit is totally positive.

4.15 pm

We move on to ask who is blocking the funding. I sense some pretty high quality buck-passing here, but I have not yet heard from the Minister of Education. I hear that the Health Minister has said that he will honour his Department's component of the funding. If that is correct, it is good news. If he was here, I would expect him to say that it is the Assembly's fault for cutting his budget again.

As I understand, the Minister of Education is also willing, in some circumstances, to honour the commitment of her Department. So what is the problem? Is it with the South Eastern Board? Is it with the trust? I really do not know, but I know that the overall budget for those two Departments is around £2,000 million for the Department of Education and £7,000 million for the Department of Health. If we cannot find £85,000 out of that, for something that is so clearly invaluable to the people who use it, there is something wrong with this place. It makes joined-up government seem like a farce.

Sue Ramsey said that we are here to make a difference. Let us have the two Ministers, with the trust and the board and whoever else needs to be there, put their heads together and sort this out. It does not seem so impossible. We discussed this at the Education Committee a couple of weeks ago, and the departmental official did not blame the Minister of Health. He just said that hard times deserve hard solutions and hard decisions. This one is too hard. It impinges on people who deserve our support, not oppression.

I hope that between the Assembly and all the relevant authorities, this can be sorted out sooner rather than later.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey):

The Committee has received substantial representations from the staff of, and the parents of the children with speech and language disabilities who attend, the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch.

I note that the Minister of Education, in a letter of 20 April 2010 to the chairperson of the commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board, acknowledged the quality of support given by the centre to these vulnerable children. I have no doubt about the level of need for this type of early intervention and the exceptional outcomes that are produced as a result of the existence of such a centre.

It is important that we place on record the position of funding to services such as the I CAN early years centre. The Committee received a letter from the Department of Education just today, which states that the statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests both with schools and with the five education and library boards. If time permits, I will return to that later.

The Department of Education's letter also makes it clear that the SEELB's decision to provide £83,000 to I CAN in 2006-07 and to continue that funding through to 2009-2010 was made entirely at the board's discretion. As to 2010-11, the Minister of Education has asked the board to advise her of its strategy to meet the needs of children with speech and language difficulties in early years, including those at the I CAN centre, and to meet her on this specific issue. As yet, no date has been set for that meeting. The Committee knows that the board has now responded to the Department, but it has not yet seen a copy of that response.

With respect to the funding of the centre from the Department of Health via the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, I understand from today's correspondence that the Health Minister has given a recent commitment to the ongoing funding of the centre. The Committee for Education has recently written to the Health Committee requesting that it raise the issue of the funding of the I CAN centre with its Minister and his officials. We await his reply.

I hope that that clarifies the current position in relation to some of the funding issues around the I CAN centre from an education perspective. I assure the House that the Committee will continue to scrutinise the matter until it has reached a satisfactory conclusion.

In the rest of the time allotted to me, I will speak as a Member of the House. It is disappointing for a centre that clearly benefits children to find itself in the situation that has developed. Members often use rhetoric and even, unfortunately, emotive language in the House, but I have seen and understood the contribution that is made by the centre in Ballynahinch and by those throughout Northern Ireland. In light of that, it would shame us, as political representatives, to use the issue to score points off the Minister of Education or the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety just because it is convenient for Members on each side of the House to deny responsibility. We all have a responsibility to ensure that every effort is made on this and other issues, and it is particularly important that children with specific needs are given priority. It is a shame, therefore, that the Minister of Education allowed the review of special educational needs to go out to public consultation.

In correspondence, the Minister refers to the fact that the legislation does not give the Department of Education any role in the identification and assessment of children with special educational needs or any power to intervene in the process. What is the Minister trying to do by changing the legislation under the current SEN proposals? She is trying to interfere in the very issue of which she now washes her hands. Therefore, I call on the Minister to ensure that she deals with that issue. It should be remembered that she was happy to have a go at removing funding from prep schools in the same area. She told us that that was not an issue of money, but of equality of access.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

It is an issue of equality of provision for children who have grave needs —

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for

Education: The Minister would be better to listen and deliver on this occasion.

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

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am glad that the spokesperson for the DUP rose to speak in this debate before I did. Following his contribution to the previous debate, I was going to have strong words with him during this one. However, in the earlier part of his contribution to this debate, his remarks were generally positive.

The debate is not about party political point scoring — Members on the Benches opposite failed to recognise that — but about the children who attend the I CAN centre and their parents. They do not care what John O'Dowd thinks of Mervyn Storey, what Mervyn Storey thinks of John O'Dowd, or what the two of us think of the two ventriloquists' dummies who sit in the corner and speak on behalf of the Health Minister. They want funding to be directed towards the I CAN centre, but we operate in a system that is governed by statutory regulations. The stringent funding mechanisms under which Departments work are set out in reams and reams of regulations.

I listened closely to what Mr Allister said. When I first read the motion, I welcomed the fact that people had been sensible by putting their names to a motion that called on both Departments to examine the way forward. However, on several occasions, Mr Allister claimed that the I CAN centre was an education matter. It came to the stage at which I thought that the Member doth deny too much. Those Members of a party whose Health Minister failed even to turn up to the debate cannot simply act as ventriloquists' dummies and tell us what they believe that he might have said. I do not know whose hand is stuffed where, but both Members have an awful habit of putting their feet in each other's mouths. If they are serious about the I CAN centre, they should come to the Chamber to try to work out a resolution to its funding problem. Contributions such as theirs do not solve that problem.

I am amazed that the Minister for Social Development, who has left the Chamber, put her name to a motion that calls for extra funding to be provided in a certain area. That Minister has a significant budget, and if her concern is as genuine as was claimed during her speech, she

could put funding towards the centre through a number of funding streams in the Department for Social Development. The Department for Social Development has some responsibility, and the development of our children and their needs is a social responsibility.

Mr McDevitt: I wonder whether the Member will address the motion or spend his five minutes dealing with what Members said about other Members and what Members might do about something that is not their responsibility. I would genuinely like to hear what he thinks about the I CAN centre.

Mr O'Dowd: I know that you are still new to this place, but this is the debating Chamber. There is debate back and forth with other people's points of view. Members may read a prepared speech if they so wish, but I do not do that. I debate the issues at hand.

Clearly, the I CAN centre has excellent special needs provision for the children who need it. We can make speeches and demand that this or that Minister funds the centre, and then we will all go home, but the parents and children will still be left without funding. The motion, which I support, calls for the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work out a funding stream for the I CAN centre. The parents, children, teachers and support network around the centre deserve a wee bit more respect than Members coming here, making sanctimonious speeches on the back of an election campaign, after they signed the motion in the first place, and calling for funding when they are in charge of a significant budget for social development.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No. If the Health Minister wants to say something, he can come and say it.

I have no doubt that all Members will support today's motion. However, they should not simply leave the Chamber and think that they have done their bit for the I CAN centre and have a clear conscience. Let us all go back to our ministerial colleagues and say that £85,000 is not a major amount of money. I am sorry to have a dig at the Alliance Party, but as someone once said, that party would spend the entire block grant within the first two weeks of an Assembly. It all adds up, but we should all go to our ministerial colleagues and say that the Executive, at their next meeting, should discuss

how they fund projects such as the I CAN centre to ensure that the good work in such centres continues. Party political broadcasts should be left at home.

Ms S Ramsey: There are surpluses in colleges. There is plenty of money there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that all remarks should be made through the Chair. For the Hansard report, we want to correct Mr O'Dowd: it is Mr McCallister not Mr Allister.

Miss McIlveen: I support the motion. The issue has become emotive over the past number of weeks. It has concerned me deeply, and I have spoken to some parents since the I CAN centre was notified of the withdrawal of funding by the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

Last week, many Members and I had the pleasure of meeting some of the children who have benefited from the fantastic service that has been offered and provided by the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch. My colleague Jim Shannon has already told the story of the little boy whom we met in the Great Hall. It was particularly heart-warming when he sang 'You Are My Sunshine' into my ear. It really made my day; such a sad life that I lead. Last year, before that little three-year-old boy attended the I CAN centre, he could not communicate, but he gave us a wonderful rendition last week. As a result of attending the I CAN centre, he will be able to participate in mainstream education. An average of 71% of the children who attend the I CAN centre are able to access mainstream education as a result.

The Minister of Education often speaks about inclusivity and equality, but what excludes a child more than the inability to communicate? What perpetuates inequality more? Children with the most complex and severe speech, language and communication difficulties attend the centre. As my colleague said, early intervention is absolutely vital.

Research shows that, where speech and language difficulties are resolved by the age of five or six, children go on to develop good literacy skills.

4.30 pm

If we want to break things down into the coldness of money, by reducing educational psychology assessments and allowing children to enter mainstream education, the centre's

work represents a cost saving in the long term. As my colleague Jim Shannon stated, the unit caters for 20 preschool children for four days a week, at a total cost to the board of £85,000. Earlier, there seemed to be some confusion over whether that amount was the entire budget. Obviously, that is not the case. The Health Department came up with the remainder. The I CAN centre is not a luxury service, and it is not a matter of trimming the fat to meet budgetary targets. The centre is an essential front line service that is all about inclusivity. Thanks to the centre, dozens of children now benefit from having enhanced social skills, which have an incredibly positive impact on their lives. In essence, that is what education is all about.

This should be a prime example of two Departments working together, yet staff working at the facility were told that funding will be removed by the end of the school year. Even worse, we have witnessed the battle of the press statements between the two Departments over which one has ultimate responsibility. I have no difficulty in supporting the motion, but I am astounded that, on 11 May, the matter has not been resolved.

Regardless of what Mr O'Dowd said when he tried to pass the buck around various Departments, we have a clear commitment from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The relevant trust will continue to fund its part, but, as yet, we have had no commitment from the Minister of Education and her hand-picked commissioners. It is that lack of funding that threatens this vital centre. Only three years ago, the chairman of the commissioners said:

"The I CAN Centre is an excellent example of the benefits of early intervention for children with special needs."

Furthermore, he was:

"keen to see more services of this nature".

It seems incredible, therefore, that the centre now faces closure. Given that the Minister of Education talks about the invaluable work that the centre does for children, and if the benefits have a value that it is too great to measure, instead of standing by like Pontius Pilate, why can she not ensure that funding be found?

Mr Shannon: Will the Member give way?

Miss McIlveen: I have only a few seconds left.

Mr Shannon: You will get an extra minute. Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, that is not for me to say.

The Member is quite right, but, as well as seeking the short-term continuance of the service, we must also look to a five- to 10-year programme. It is very important that that happens.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

Miss McIlveen: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank my colleague for his intervention.

Obviously, we do not want to have to rehearse the same issue next year.

As Mr Storey said, there is an amazing similarity to the prep school issue. The Department of Education always seems to seek short-term balance sheet gains, without considering long-term budgetary costs. In the long term, it is quite obvious that the cost to the education budget of losing the I CAN centre will be much greater. Common sense needs to prevail.

Finally, perhaps the Minister will give the House a definitive date for the publication of the early years strategy.

Mr B McCrea: I would be grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you would clarify to colleagues across the way that Mr McCallister is not the leader of the TUV. In fact, he is my colleague. It is good to hear from all the MPs in here. Hopefully, they will all be away from here soon, leaving just Caitríona and me to debate things and to get down to some real nitty-gritty.

Mr Lunn asked whether the following, from a letter to the Committee for Education, is true:

"It would be the Department's view that this project requires funding from both the health and education services and Caitríona Ruane has welcomed the Health Minister's recent commitment to ongoing funding."

That seems to me to be fairly definitive.

I am extremely disappointed by Mr O'Dowd's disposition. This did not have to be a cantankerous debate. Many of us met the parents and children from the I CAN centre in the Great Hall. In fact, I seem to remember that Mr McCarthy managed to completely wreck the entire security system by bringing those people in through the gates.

Mr McCarthy: No problem.

Mr B McCrea: No matter: it was an important issue, and I notice that all of the Members who have spoken in the debate were there. I am not sure whether Mr O'Dowd was at that gathering, but what came through loud and clear was that the people, parents and politicians who were there were not playing politics: they were there because the I CAN service really matters to them.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: Is it not the case that the Minister of Education is playing politics with the South Eastern Education and Library Board in that she is refusing to put the board in place and that commissioners, not elected representatives, are making decisions?

Mr B McCrea: The Minister makes — sorry, elevation all round — the Chairman of the Committee for Education makes an interesting point. In 2006-07, the Department of Education was able to release £83,000, which the South Eastern Education and Library Board used to fund the I CAN centre. The Minister of Education has requested a meeting with the commissioners to find out their strategy. So far, there is no date for such a meeting.

I will not play politics with the I CAN centre. It is disgraceful that Members on the opposite Benches attempt to prevaricate and frustrate the whole process by trying to bring petty party politics into the debate.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will not give way, because the Member would not give way here. In a proper debate, the issue involves the simple sum of £85,000 that the Minister of Education can and should find. It is not a huge sum of money, but it is really important to the children, parents and staff at that school. There is no disagreement among us about the value of such intervention. There should be no disagreement about the necessity to find a solution. All that we are asking for here, and I gave this commitment to those parents with whom I talked in the Great Hall, is for Members to talk to their respective Ministers and ask them whether there is funding. Sue Ramsey was among the people there. I told her that I could make that commitment. I stood there and I did —

Ms S Ramsey: I am from the liberal wing of my party: I think that is why the Member gave way.

Does he agree that it may be useful for him to ask his party leader to release the money for pastoral care in colleges that has not been spent? Maybe that money should be released and used for better purposes.

Mr B McCrea: I gave way because the Member usually gives way to me when I ask her to do so, which is fair in a debate. I think that there is common cause on this issue. I do not believe that we need fall out on it. I am disappointed about the tone that comes across.

Ms S Ramsey: *[Interruption.]*

Mr B McCrea: No, I am being serious: there is general agreement in the debate. I am completely won over by arguments about communication and the impact that it has on people in all walks of life. I know that there must be early intervention and that such intervention makes a huge difference for people. We should be able to find a relatively small sum of money without falling out on this issue.

My colleague and I were very positive, but I think that we may have been misinterpreted by Mr O'Dowd. There is a responsibility on the part of the Health Minister, which my colleague Mr McCallister dealt with, and a responsibility on the Education Minister, which I have dealt with. What we were clearly and genuinely saying was: please, Education Minister, can you find a sum of money that you can give to those poor parents, teachers and children? It is a worthwhile project; it is worth doing and worth doing now. Please, please, please will you do something? I need say no more; I just urge the Minister of Education to have some humility and some conscience and to help those children.

Mr Donaldson: I congratulate my colleague the Member for Strangford Mr Shannon for securing the debate along with a cross-party group of MLAs who supported the motion. I also congratulate him on his recent victory in the Strangford constituency. I look forward to sitting with him on the green Benches in the House of Commons.

I am not sure whether this will be my last speech in the Assembly before Basil has his wish and the place is rid of Members of Parliament. If it is my last speech in the House, for the time being, there could not be a better subject on which to speak, because children with special needs has been an issue close to my heart for many years. Above all else,

I enjoy my work as a governor of Parkview Special School in Lisburn. It is a great privilege for a public representative to be involved in that kind of work and working on behalf of children with special needs. In fairness to the Minister, it is an issue to which she has given a degree of priority in her Department. I echo the sentiments of the Member for Lagan Valley Basil McCrea that this debate should not be rancorous. I think that there is consensus across the House that we want to help the I CAN centre; we want to keep the centre open.

Like all colleagues, I have received representations from a number of my constituents. The I CAN centre is in Ballynahinch, which was formerly in South Down, but is now in the Strangford constituency. A number of parents from the Lagan Valley area have had their children attend the I CAN centre or hope to have their children attend it in the future. I want to quote from a letter that I received from a parent in Moira whose child attended the I CAN centre. The parent states:

"When our daughter was 18 months old, we were concerned that her speech was not developing at an appropriate rate. We raised concerns with our health visitor and soon after, our daughter attended language therapy at Lisburn. Although a very bright child, her difficulties were very complex and she was recommended for a place at I CAN."

Although I was a primary school teacher myself for 16 years, I had no idea how to support my daughter, as all conventional methods of support had failed. She was totally mute outside of the house and her speech at home was unintelligible. The I CAN team changed all of that and despite the fact that they diagnosed in her a severe disorder of her sound system, she started making good progress after a few months of intensive therapy. The team also provided parents with effective and innovative training which was invaluable in the support of our children."

The parent went on to say:

"By the end of her Nursery year, our child had finally mastered speech and was able to transfer to mainstream primary school that September, with minimum support required in the community. She has excellent literacy skills, is very musical and is a very confident P1 child."

I am positive that our daughter would have been condemned to years of anguish if she had not received this expert help when she did."

Those words speak louder and more intelligibly than I ever could in explaining the benefits of the I CAN centre and the life-changing impact that it has on the children who attend it.

I add my voice to those of other Members who have spoken in appealing to the Minister. I recognise the financial constraints on her Department, and I know that it is not easy. She has got to prioritise and look at how to spend a limited budget. However, there is no doubt, as the Member for Strangford highlighted in his opening remarks, that if the Department and the board do not provide the funding and the I CAN centre is closed, there will be a net cost to the system in the future. Children who benefit from early intervention can go on to mainstream education, and the cost of providing them with specialist support is not as great as the costs that will be required if we lose this expertise.

I appeal to the Minister to see and examine with her counterpart, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, whether there is any way that funding can be found to sustain the I CAN centre, not only for one year — I want her to look at the longer-term sustainability of the centre. I believe that it would be money well spent. On behalf of the parents whom I represent and the children whom they care for, I hope that the Minister will be able to get a positive result. If she does, she will have support across the House.

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

4.45 pm

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I had hoped that the Health Minister would have chosen to respond to the debate, and I am disappointed that he has not. The reason I have decided to respond is that regardless of the difference of opinion — and there clearly is one in the House on the issue of responsibility — we are talking about young children with special needs, and I place children with special needs at the top of my agenda.

Thug mé cuairt ar Ionad luathbhlianta I CAN ar Bhunscoil Bhaile na hInse agus chonaic mé le mo shúile féin an obair ríluachmhar atá á déanamh do pháistí óga.

I visited the I CAN centre at Ballynahinch Primary School, and I have seen for myself the invaluable work that it does for young children.

As Minister of Education, I have the responsibility for the management of the annual education budget. My primary role is in setting education policy, putting legislation in place to support that policy and ensuring that it is adequately resourced. My Department's vision is to ensure that every learner fulfils her or his potential at each stage of their development, and that is particularly important with regard to children with special educational needs. I am determined that resources be targeted at those with the greatest need.

To ensure that local needs are identified and met, roles and responsibilities are delegated to bodies outside the Department: the education and library boards. In the area serviced by the I CAN centre, the South Eastern Education and Library Board has a statutory responsibility to identify and make provision for children with special educational needs, and it is funded by my Department to do so.

Tá freagracht reachtúil ar bhoird oideachais agus leabharlainne riachtanais oideachais speisialta páistí a shainithint, a mheas agus le riar orthu.

Education and library boards have the statutory responsibility for identifying, assessing and meeting the special educational needs of children. Under special education legislation, the education and library boards have a statutory duty to identify those children who have attained the age of two and who have, or probably have, special educational needs, and, having done so, to determine the special educational provision that any learning difficulty the child has calls for. It is the education and library boards that are best placed to identify and respond to local needs in their areas. In the current financial year, the block grant to the SEELB is £78.7 million.

The I CAN centre provides speech and language services for up to 20 preschool children and also provides support for parents. I am advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the I CAN centre opened for pupils in September 2000 in agreement with the SEELB, the Down Lisburn Trust — now the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust — and the I CAN charity. The I CAN charity provided initial grant aid for two years. I understand that, following this, the SEELB funded the teacher, the classroom assistant and some clerical assistance and resources. Down Lisburn Trust

— now part of South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust — funded the speech and language therapist. The board and trust continued to jointly fund the project following that period.

Due to major financial expenditure, the South Eastern Education and Library Board sought funding from the Department for the I CAN centre in 2006. The Department allocated £83,000 to each education and library board in 2006-07 to meet pressures relating to special educational needs provision. It was a matter for each education and library board to determine the deployment of that funding, but the Department noted that the SEELB would use that funding for the I CAN centre. It was made clear that that funding was non-recurrent — for one year.

I understand that in 2007-08 the SEELB funded £80,000 towards the I CAN centre and the trust funded a speech and language therapist. In 2008-09, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provided £50,000 in addition to continuing to provide the speech and language therapist, with the South Eastern Education and Library Board contributing £35,000. In 2009-2010 the trust provided £80,000 in addition to funding the speech and language therapist, with the South Eastern Education and Library Board providing £8,000. The trust, therefore, as funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, is the project's major funder.

The chairperson of the South Eastern Education and Library Board commissioners wrote to me before the Budget for 2010-11 was confirmed by the Executive. The chairperson requested additional funding to sustain the I CAN centre for the 2010-11 academic year before knowing Budget decisions. In that letter, he advised me that:

"At a recent meeting with senior officials from the trust, the SEELB was advised that due to financial pressures the SEHSCT would not be in a position to continue funding".

The chief executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board had previously written to departmental officials in January 2009 requesting additional funds for I CAN, at which time it was stressed that funding of local special educational needs provision such as I CAN is a matter for the board in its prioritisation of its budget. I wrote to the chairperson, reiterating that it is the responsibility of each

education and library board to identify local need and to allocate funding that best meets identified special educational need in its area.

I also asked the chairperson to advise me of the SEELB's strategy to meet the needs of all children in the board area with speech, language and communication difficulties in early years and to meet to discuss those issues. The chairperson has since responded with details of the funding provided by the SEELB to meet speech and language and social communication needs, but he has not detailed its strategic approach. I will be raising that again as a matter of urgency.

This year, the SEELB has received approximately £300,000 of earmarked funding for speech and language provision. Since 2001, the education and library boards have received an additional £9 million of earmarked funding to improve speech and language provision, including early intervention programmes. I note that the SEELB invests a considerable part of its earmarked and block grant budget allocation on speech, language and communication provision, but it is a matter for the board to determine its priorities from those allocations.

I recognise fully the importance of early intervention for children with speech and language difficulties. That is why, in 2001, my Department initiated the early intervention for children with learning difficulties project to promote collaboration between education and library boards and health and social care trusts in delivering early intervention. The aim of that project was to minimise difficulties in acquiring literacy skills for children who enter school with language delay by concentrating on the delivery of a more efficient and effective service for children at Key Stage 1. The project was designed to build partnerships in order to facilitate ongoing, effective collaboration between teachers and speech and language therapists. Each education and library board established a project in its area, and evaluation showed positive outcomes in the effective working between health and education and positive results in the outcomes for children's language and communication skills.

The delivery of speech and language therapy is the responsibility of health and social care trusts, and I have written to the Health Minister to acknowledge the funding provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care

Trust to I CAN. I have also asked the Health Minister to advise of his Department's strategic direction on that type of provision with a view to departmental officials and health and education providers continuing to work together to ensure that the needs of children who present with speech, language and communication difficulties are met.

I have also written to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michael McGimpsey, to request a meeting. To date, I have not received a response, and I look forward to his response. I am prepared to meet Minister Michael McGimpsey on the matter.

My Department has been working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, along with other key stakeholders, in the development of a speech, language and communication therapy action plan. The action plan is in response to the review by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2004-05, which raised concerns about the provision of speech and language therapy and led to the commissioning of the speech and language therapy task force report.

I am advised by the Health Minister that he anticipates that the draft action plan will be published and go out for full public consultation this summer, and I look forward to his response. Officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education have been working closely on the action plan, which will lay down the direction of the further development of speech and language services over the next two years and acknowledge the importance of joint working and the need for services to be developed in a multidisciplinary model designed around the child. The I CAN centre is an example of effective early intervention and multi-agency working. There are other examples of successful multi-agency preschool and early intervention provision across the North of Ireland that is funded from the boards' allocated budgets.

There has been a deliberate attempt to mislead parents and the public over where responsibility rests for the funding of I CAN. I reiterate that I am prepared to meet the Health Minister to discuss the issue, and I hope that that the Minister's two colleagues will bring that message back to him. I look forward to a response to a request for a meeting. I am also prepared to meet the Minister for Social

Development, even though she did not request a meeting; maybe her colleague on the SDLP Bench will tell the Minister that. In the run-up to an election, she signed this motion to discuss this important matter further.

I want to mention the example of the Welcome Service, which is a preschool speech and language centre that is funded by the Western Education and Library Board from within existing allocations. The Western Education and Library Board advises that the service was designed to fit seamlessly with other arrangements for school-age children and, working in collaboration with the Western Health and Social Care Trust, to provide more opportunities for inclusion and to allow staff to increase outreach support and thereby provide greater access to a greater number of children.

I have striven to ensure that as many resources as possible are directed to the provision of special educational needs. It is not appropriate for my Department to specify how education and library boards prioritise their funding. However, I assure Members that I am happy to meet my ministerial colleagues, the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, on the matter. I assure Members that I will continue to prioritise children with special educational needs.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion. I am delighted that it has been signed by Members of all the different parties in the Assembly. That being the case, it is vital, indeed imperative, that a solution to this serious problem is found immediately. I am angry and disgusted that the authorities seem to have turned their backs on the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch. I am disappointed that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is not in the Chamber. In fact, I was led to believe earlier that the Minister of Education would not be here, and I raised that matter angrily at the Business Committee meeting. I am delighted to say that somebody must have told her, and she has —

Ms Anderson: She always intended to come.

Mr McCarthy: Pardon? Well, she has graced us with her presence, and I am delighted to see her.

Like other Members, I have been to the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch to see at first hand the excellent work that is being done by all concerned and to see how it has benefited so many children. The I CAN centre has

been operational for over 10 years and has a fantastic success rate. It would be almost criminal for any Member to deny I CAN its annual ring-fenced funding.

As has been mentioned earlier, the Programme for Government was introduced in the Assembly by the former First Minister, and he quite rightly said that the children in Northern Ireland are our future and must be supported. Only yesterday, in response to a question on children's issues, junior Minister Kelly told the Assembly that:

"Children and young people remain a priority for Ministers and the Executive." — [Official Report, Vol 51, No 4, p187, col 2].

That was repeated yesterday. If the abandonment of the I CAN centre goes ahead, all these weasel words will be hypocritical. That will lessen the credibility of the Executive and our Assembly.

5.00 pm

Mr Donaldson: Having listened to the Minister's response, I think that it seems the problem is that Ministers are not talking to each other. Is the Member willing to join me and other Members on a cross-party basis in seeking to convene a meeting, which we would invite Ministers to attend, to see whether we can resolve the issue? Frankly, the parents and children deserve better.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for his intervention. I will gladly join with anyone to see the decision reversed and the sooner the better, because, as I understand it, redundancy notices have been placed on the staff. That situation cannot be allowed to go any further.

I have already been in touch with interested authorities, and it seems to me that each is almost blaming the other for not sorting out the problem. That is simply not good enough. I would like to ask the Minister of Education a few questions. She may well have answered them, but they are important questions. If members of her staff are about, they can forward a reply to me. In a reply to me, Minister Ruane said that funding had been given to the board for the continuation of the I CAN centre. If that is the case, why is the chairman of the board asking the Department to have earmarked funds to support the I CAN centre? Who takes responsibility for funding the centre? I respectfully ask the Minister to seek reasons, if any, why the SEELB chose not to fund the I

CAN centre, when the Western Board, which the Minister mentioned, continues to provide yearly funding for its preschool speech and language nursery.

In my correspondence with the South Eastern Trust, it stated that its responsibility was to provide speech and language therapists, which it did and is still willing to do. That is encouraging, and we are grateful for that commitment. Unfortunately, the trust informed me — I think that the Minister referred to this — that it does not have any non-recurrent funding for this year. That is where the problem lies, and it could be sorted out if we had a joint meeting with the Ministers. The Minister for Social Development has been brought in to the debate. If she is willing to help — I am sure that she is — she is welcome to join us to try to get the matter sorted out now.

Mr Donaldson: The Member will be aware that the children who attend the I CAN centre are entitled to preschool places and that, if they cannot attend that centre, they will be entitled to apply for places elsewhere which are funded, presumably, by the Department or the board. Is he aware that, in the Lisburn area, there are a large number of parents whose children have not been able to obtain preschool placements, with the result that the closure of the I CAN centre will simply compound an existing problem?

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for his intervention. What he said is common sense. It would be absolutely ridiculous to allow the I CAN centre to close. It simply cannot happen.

Ms S Ramsey: This has been a useful discussion and debate. I am conscious that we have had a response from the Minister of Education, which has probably moved the debate on a step further. However, will the Deputy Speaker ensure that the Minister for Social Development and the Health Minister receive a copy of the Official Report of the debate? At least they will get a feel for what Members were saying today, and we will get an idea of what they are saying.

Mr McCarthy: It makes sense for us to do that. I am sure that the Deputy Speaker will agree with that.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: I have only 10 minutes, and I have to respond to all you guys, so let me hammer on. I have been too generous.

The fourth question is to ask the Minister to explain how the SEELB will meet its statutory responsibilities for children with speech and language difficulties in their early years. As Jeffrey said, children are undergoing statutory assessment of their need for the I CAN centre's preschool speech and language support. If the I CAN centre is allowed to close — it must not be — how on earth is the board going to provide for those children at the level that they require?

It has been proven, as was mentioned earlier, that the cost benefit to the Executive and the SEELB could be up to £125,000 per annum. Surely it makes sense to save that money and, at the same time, provide the funding so that the I CAN centre can continue its excellent provision. Ministers must show the worth of the Assembly and withdraw the redundancy notices as soon as possible.

I will try to respond to as many contributors to the debate as possible and as quickly as possible. Jim Shannon proposed the motion and explained to Members the original working of the I CAN centre, its success and the need for its retention, on which all Members agree. Sue Ramsey acknowledged that the Programme for Government made children a priority. That is absolutely right, and it was reiterated yesterday by junior Minister Kelly. John McCallister defended the Health Minister and blamed the Education Department. All Ministers should come together and sort it out. John spoke about early intervention; we all agree on that. If the I CAN centre goes, our children will be betrayed.

Margaret Ritchie, who has left the Chamber, spoke about children's progress to mainstream education. That is very important; indeed it is the very essence of the existence of the I CAN centre. My colleague Trevor Lunn mentioned the issues of cost and health non-recurring funds, which represent small change compared with the multimillion pound budget that Trevor mentioned. Mervyn Storey, who is not here, spoke of the correspondence among the various bodies. Answers need to be forthcoming. I hope that Ministers can help. I was delighted to hear the Chairperson of the Education Committee moving away from point scoring.

John O'Dowd queried the ability of the Minister for Social Development, if any, to contribute

to the support of the I CAN centre. I support John: if Margaret Ritchie can help, we should all encourage her to do so.

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

Mr McCarthy: Michelle, Basil, Jeffrey and the Minister — every one of us in the Assembly — are fully supportive of the retention of the I CAN centre. We know the work that it has done, and, as I said earlier, it would be criminal for it to close. That must not happen. Let us prove that the Assembly works.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to arrange urgent discussions to secure funding for the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch that will ensure the long-term future of this vital facility.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Business Committee for agreeing to list the important issue of upgrading the Downpatrick to Newry road for an Adjournment debate. I also thank the Minister for Regional Development for his attendance. I wish to place on record an apology from my South Down colleague Margaret Ritchie MP. Our new South Down Member of Parliament is off to London this evening on official business, so she cannot be with us. I know that Margaret is fully au fait with the issues under debate, and she has asked me to place on record her full support for the upgrade.

The road that I referred to is 30 miles long and runs right across the centre of south Down, from the city of Newry to the county town of Downpatrick. To strengthen my case for an upgrade of the road, rather than referring to the city of Newry I should have said that the road extends from Downpatrick to the main Belfast to Dublin route, to the railway station at Newry and to the A2 link with Warrenpoint port. To reach those modern facilities, lorry drivers, bus drivers and motorists have to endure a time-consuming and hazardous journey to get to both Newry and Downpatrick and to the main eastern corridor or to join the Enterprise train at Newry or the regular bus services to and from Dublin.

There are literally hundreds of dangerous bends along the 30-mile route, and the many side roads that exit on to the main road simply add to that danger. I recently carried out a survey of the number of exits on the subject route, and I was surprised by the findings. Excluding private dwellings, business properties, churches, schools, sporting venues and gateways leading to farmyards and farmland, 132 adapted roads lead directly on to the Downpatrick to Newry road. Many of the exits from the side roads are blind ones, because of the lack of proper

visibility splays. Motorists entering the main road from those treacherous junctions take their life in their hands and pose a risk to other people's lives as they gamble with their safety and that of others. For example, the Ballyweely Road enters the B8 between Hilltown and the square at Kilcoo. The Minister should seek a report on that junction to see exactly what I mean. While I am speaking about that area, I wish to thank the Roads Service and a co-operative landowner for the great improvements that were carried out recently at the point where the Kinghill Road enters the main Hilltown to Castlewellan section of the B8. That is a fine example of how beneficial such improvements can be.

The Newry to Downpatrick route is identified in two main sections, namely the A25 and the B8, as well as a short section of the A2, which is included where it passes through the village of Clough. It services a large hinterland around Downpatrick, and it passes through the built-up areas of Clough, Annsborough, Castlewellan, Kilcoo, Hilltown and Mayobridge. It is one of Northern Ireland's busiest tourist routes, which is understandable given that it is one of the gateways to the Mourne, to St Patrick's Trail and to the many valuable assets that the area has to offer to the tourist industry.

There are major hospitals at either end of the major route, namely the Downe Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital. It should not be necessary for me to point out the benefits that the upgrade of that road would bring to the patients who attend those hospitals, particularly those who are rushed to them on life-saving missions.

In the past, I have often attempted on behalf of constituents to deal with refused planning applications for sites fronting the B8, only to be told by the Planning Service that the Department of the Environment had identified the road as a protected route and that approvals could not, therefore, be given. If one Department finds it necessary to protect what is in its care, the Minister for Regional Development must have an obligation to protect that which is in his care, namely the users of the main Newry to Downpatrick route.

I know only too well the constant demands made on the public purse, and I, therefore, do not expect an overnight upgrade of the road. However, I ask the Minister to consider my request for an upgrade to be made in

three stages. First, I ask the Minister to immediately introduce safety measures at the most dangerous locations along the road. For example, 500 m south of the series of bends known as the Seven Sisters in the townland of Ballydulany, which is less than 1 mile from the centre of the village of Mayobridge, there is an accident black spot that is causing great concern locally. Serious accidents have occurred and continued to occur at that spot. Lives have been lost at the location, and local people fear that more lives will be lost if something is not done to reduce the dangers that exist there. There are many other dangerous locations along the subject route that could be made safer, if only by applying rumble strips or adequate warning signs. I ask the Minister to have his Department draw up a list of the most dangerous spots immediately, with a view to addressing those problems and fears. Secondly, the Department for Regional Development should put in place a programme of work to gradually remove, in a prioritised manner, the many bad bends and dips in the road that are a constant hazard to road users. Thirdly, the Downpatrick to Newry road should be upgraded to a standard that is in keeping with its modern-day usage and to address any subsequent dangers. I know that that will require time and money, but it will never happen if it is not included in a strategic programme of work.

I, therefore, earnestly beg the Minister to set about drawing up a major works programme for the B8 and A25 roads from Newry to Downpatrick, because only when that becomes a proper working document can any real efforts be made to advance the proposals therein. I again thank the Minister for his attendance, and I look forward to his initial response to my three-tier request.

5.15 pm

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate PJ Bradley on securing this Adjournment debate and for raising an important issue about which all the Members for South Down are concerned. I, too, thank the Minister for being in attendance.

I understand the economic circumstances that the Minister and his Department face. I am sure that all Members agree that we must prioritise our limited resources. I am a member of the Regional Development Committee, as

John was previously, and I see at first hand the underinvestment in roads maintenance. On a weekly basis, we hear about all the projects that are needed, including our project, the A24 Ballynahinch bypass, which, thankfully, is being progressed. This issue affects all rural areas, not just south Down. As a member of the Committee, I have argued for the B8/A25 to have a more strategic role, particularly in relation to the pivotal function that it plays with regard to tourism in the area. It is the main artery to Dublin from the tourist product in south Down, namely the Mourne, which are the biggest attraction in the area, although Jim Shannon would probably say different in relation to Strangford Lough.

Sinn Féin has lobbied for the implementation of a single tourism strategy for the promotion of south Down and counties north and south of the border. To attract additional visitors to south Down, we need to have in place an improved infrastructure that can accommodate them. In our area, the NITB has identified the Mourne and the St Patrick's Christian heritage project as signature tourism projects. Currently, tourism in the Mourne contributes £72 million to the local economies of Banbridge, Down, and Newry and Mourne.

Many areas of great natural beauty suffer because of their attractive qualities, and south Down is no exception. I want the Department to give equal weight to our industries, which are mainly tourism, agriculture and fishing. There are very few factories in the area, with the aircraft factory and a couple of fish processing factories in Kilkeel being the exceptions. However, there are restaurants, hotels, B&Bs, cafes, public houses and small and medium-sized enterprises that are dependent on tourists getting to south Down. We do not have rail; all we have is road.

Those of us who know the B8/A25 know that it is dangerous, with its sharp corners and sweeping bends, particularly, as has been mentioned, on the stretch between Mayobridge and Hilltown, which is known as the Seven Sisters. I am sure that the Minister knows that part of the road very well. Indeed, I remember going on school trips and swinging about in the back of the bus. It was like a rollercoaster.

On a serious note, I remind the Minister that there have been serious collisions on the road linking Downpatrick and Newry, including dozens

of fatalities, in recent years. The volume of traffic and demands on the road have increased. It is estimated that 6,000 to 9,000 cars use the B8/A25. The A25 section, between Downpatrick and Clough, is very busy and carries around 9,000 cars a day. Another busy stretch is the Hilltown to Newry section, which incorporates traffic coming from the Mournes on the B27 Kilkeel Road and from Newcastle on the B180 Bryansford Road.

I do not want to be totally negative. I pay tribute to the staff at Roads Service for endeavouring to do their best with the resources that they have. There have been resurfacing projects, as P J touched upon, in and around Kilcoo, in Clonvaraghan, which is outside Castlewellan, and in Hilltown. There have also been traffic calming schemes in a number of towns, as well as junction improvements at Burrenreagh Road, Castlewellan; the Castlewellan Road and Kinghill Road junction in Hilltown; and the Vianstown Road junction in Downpatrick, all of which are to be welcomed.

I will touch on a couple of issues that require the Department to recognise the unique circumstances in south Down. The B8/A25 road will carry more tourists to our area. Newry and Mourne and Down District Councils are committed to tourism, which is the main backbone of our economy, and more tourists are visiting the area as a result of the strategies that are in place. We have a unique landscape, which includes the Mourne Mountains, the strategic importance of Newcastle, the potential of the Silent Valley, the Christian heritage and cultural trails, including St Patrick's Trail from Armagh to Downpatrick, and that other tourist gem, Strangford Lough. We have to improve the roads to facilitate tourism growth, rather than just responding to demand and continually firefighting.

The economic impact of tourism arises from expenditure by visitors to the Mournes area on accommodation, retail, catering and attractions, thereby supporting direct employment in those businesses. Good transport links are essential to the long-term growth of our economy. Moreover, under the proposed reorganisation of local councils in the RPA, Newry and Mourne District Council and Down District Council will amalgamate. Given that proposed merger, an enhanced road network is needed to link the two main towns within the boundaries of the new council. Is there potential to submit

a bid for European funding to improve road infrastructure to support tourism development under the INTERREG programme?

Mr McCallister: I thank my colleague Mr PJ Bradley for securing the debate and the Minister for attending and responding to it.

Much of the case for an upgrade to the B8 has been laid out by my colleagues. Knowing the road, the area, the surrounding countryside and the pressures on them very well, I think there is an excellent case for the route moving up the Roads Service agenda. From my time on the Regional Development Committee, I am aware of the difficulties that Roads Service faces and the pressures that it is under in prioritising its workload.

I want to make the case to the Minister that, in building and renewing the economy in south Down, particularly tourism, as pointed out by Mr Willie Clarke, it is vital that we improve its infrastructure. The fact that the South Down constituency contains two of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's signature projects — the Mournes and part of St Patrick's Trail — emphasises its importance to a tourism strategy. The fact that the constituency links in to Strangford Lough and opens up to other parts of Northern Ireland underlines why it is vital to improve the pivotal section of road between Newry and Downpatrick.

In addition to tourism, we need to develop and encourage our small and medium-sized businesses, as they respond best when the infrastructure that they need to grow and flourish is in place. Improving the B8 is a key part of building the infrastructure in order to improve a key corridor of the South Down constituency.

I also make the case for improving the safety of the road. Mr PJ Bradley made the case for that very well and recognised that it will not happen overnight due to budgetary constraints. However, it would be good if the Minister could tell us about some of the work that will happen to improve the B8 route in the short to medium term and address some of the severe safety concerns that my colleagues and others have raised. Roads Service can make a huge contribution to improving the safety and quality of our roads, which is vital to everyone in the area. Mr PJ Bradley mentioned certain sections of the B8 route, and the Seven Sisters section was also mentioned. Various sections of the

road need to be improved. We cannot overstate the importance of such improvements to road safety and to our economy in south Down, and I urge the Minister to do all that he can to make sure that they happen.

Ms Ruane: Le roinnt blianta anuas, phléigh mé an cheist seo le muintir an Dúin Theas, agus tá siad iontach buartha faoi staid líonra na mbóithre sa Dún Theas. Níl cuid mhór de na bóithre seo oiriúnach don fheidhm, go háirithe na bóithre sin i gceantair tuaithe, agus chuir an drochgheimhreadh go mór leis an bhfadhb seo.. I want to clarify that I am speaking as an MLA for the area.

Ní gan ábhar a luaigh mo chomhghleacaí, Willie Clarke, go ndearna Sinn Féin stocaireacht i bhfabhar fheidhmiú straitéis aonair margaíochta um thurasóireacht chun an Dúin Theas agus an cheantair máguaird a chur chun cinn. Ach chun cuairteoirí breise a mhealladh chuig an Dún Theas, ní mór córas feabhsaithe bonneagair a bheith i bhfeidhm le cur in áit an bhonneagair reatha, ar oidhreacht ó pholasaithe dír-rialaithe é.

I have been engaging with the people of the South Down constituency on this issue for a number of years. There are serious concerns about the state of the road network that services the area. Many of the roads, particularly in rural areas, are simply not fit for purpose, and my colleague Willie Clarke named some of them. The severe winter has compounded the problem.

The Department for Regional Development needs to recognise that a lack of spatial development throughout the North, but particularly in south Down, is having a significant impact on developing the area's tourism infrastructure. Willie Clarke spoke about that, and it is essential that we build our tourism infrastructure from Newgrange to the Mournes to capitalise on the tourist potential of that part of the island.

Feicfidh Seirbhís na mBóithre ó mo chomhfhreagras roimhe seo gur chóir do mhuintir an Dúin Theas a bheith buartha faoi shábháilteacht líonra na mbóithre áitiúla agus faoi na tionchair atá aige seo ar shláinte agus ar shábháilteacht gluaisteánaithe agus coisithe araon.

Willie Clarke rightly pointed out that Sinn Féin has consistently lobbied for the implementation of a single tourism marketing strategy for the

promotion of south Down and neighbouring counties in both parts of Ireland. However, in order to attract additional visitors to south Down, we need an improved road system to replace the current system, which is a legacy of direct rule policies. South Down has suffered from a failure of investment, and we aim to change that.

I also want to make the Minister aware of the serious number of collisions along the road that links Downpatrick and Newry, which were referred to. There is a clear need for Roads Service to assess the safety of the road network linking Downpatrick and Newry and to carry out safety and improvement schemes as a matter of urgency. I would very much welcome from the Minister, Conor Murphy, details of what his Department is doing to improve that road. I am sure that Conor is also very aware of dangerous sections of the road. The Seven Sisters were mentioned, a series of bends on a lengthy stretch of road between Kilcoo, Hilltown and Mayobridge. It is important that the necessary resources be made available to Newry and Mourne District Council and Down District Council so that road improvements can be carried out. I have no doubt that the Minister is listening carefully and that he will carry out a detailed assessment as a matter of priority.

Roads Service will see from my correspondence that the people of south Down are justifiably concerned about the safety of local road networks and the implications for the health and safety of motorists and pedestrians. As Conor is well aware, I was to the fore in campaigning for the border-link bridge across Carlingford Lough at Narrow Water, near Warrenpoint. We worked as part of the North/South Ministerial Council, as well as with Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council. That type of flagship development is essential if we are to develop a co-operative approach to trade and tourism, and it would make Crotlieve, the Mournes and north Louth much more accessible tourist destinations, as well as improving the lives of the many commuters who regularly travel across the border in both directions. As I said, we need to develop our tourism product from Newgrange to the Mournes and to capitalise on the number of visitors that Newgrange gets every year.

Tá cúpla ceist agam don Aire. An bhféadfá an t-eolas is déanaí a thabhairt dom ar a bhfuil á déanamh agatsa mar Aire Forbartha Réigiúnaí

lena chinntiú go mbeidh comhoibriú leis an Rialtas ó dheas chun dul chun cinn a dhéanamh sa réimse seo?

I would very much appreciate an update on what my colleague the Minister for Regional Development is doing to ensure that there is co-operation on the matter with the Government in the South of Ireland at Minister-to-Minister level and also at North/South Ministerial Council level. I would also welcome an update on the A24 Ballynahinch bypass and the A7 from Doran's Rock to Rowallane.

5.30 pm

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to debate the upgrading of the B8 route from Downpatrick to Newry. I do not have to explain to the Members who are present that the route from Downpatrick to Newry falls within the Newry and Mourne District Council and Down District Council areas. It passes through a number of villages, including Mayobridge, Kilcoo, Castlewellan and Clough, en route from Newry to Downpatrick. The B8 section of the route in the Newry and Mourne council area extends northwards from Newry for about 15.5 miles through Mayobridge and Hilltown, joining the A25 a mile west of Kilcoo in the Down council area. The final section of the route — the A25 — extends for 16 miles from Kilcoo through Castlewellan, Clough and on to Downpatrick.

Traffic volumes on the B8 between Hilltown and Kilcoo have been measured at about 6,100 vehicles a day, dropping to about 5,500 vehicles a day between Kilcoo and Castlewellan. Traffic volumes are slightly higher along the A25 between Castlewellan and Clough at 6,300 vehicles a day, and between Clough and Downpatrick they rise to about 8,200 vehicles a day. There are 1,062 miles of road network in the entire Newry and Mourne district and 750 miles in the Down district. When compared with other roads here, particularly in the Newry and Mourne and Down council areas, the B8 is not so heavily trafficked.

The context in which Roads Service improves the road network in the North is set out in the regional development strategy and, more specifically, in the regional transportation strategy. Its purpose is to support the regional development strategy and to make a significant contribution to achieving the longer-term vision

for transport throughout the North. Members will be aware of the key components of the regional transportation strategy and the need to concentrate our efforts on improving the regional strategic road network. Members will also be aware of the substantial improvement works that have been carried out over the past number of years to upgrade the A1 Belfast to Dublin strategic corridor. The final section of that project, at Newry, which has been ongoing for the past three years at a cost of £182 million, is due for completion later this year. Further work is ongoing to progress other proposed major improvement schemes in the Newry and Down areas of the North, including the A24 Ballynahinch bypass, the A7 at Doran's Rock and Rowallane and plans for a Newry southern relief road.

The A25 and B8 Downpatrick to Newry route falls within the subregional transport plan, and any work or improvements on it must compete for the available finance against the demands for improvement to other sections of the road network. As Members will be aware, Roads Service prepares annual work programmes to improve and maintain the road network in line with the available funding. That work typically includes a range of measures, such as minor improvement schemes, traffic management measures, street lighting, winter gritting and improvements to highway structures, and structural maintenance, including resurfacing work.

Roads Service prepares programmes that detail the works to be carried out on a council area basis. Those are presented to the relevant councils for consideration, including Newry and Mourne District Council and Down District Council, during the spring and autumn each year. Copies of those reports can be obtained online from Roads Service southern division, in which the Newry to Downpatrick route lies.

I should explain that, in distributing the resources available for the maintenance and improvement of roads, allocations are made to the four Roads Service divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators that are tailored to each activity. The divisions use those indicators when apportioning resources across the council areas to ensure, as far as possible, that there is an equitable distribution of funds across the North.

Across the Newry and Mourne and Down council areas, Roads Service spent in the region of

£19 million in the 2009-2010 financial year. For example, the spend in the Newry and Mourne council area last year included more than £5.7 million on structural maintenance, £932,000 on minor improvement works, £463,000 on traffic management measures and £404,000 on highway structures. In the Down District Council area, £4,225,000 was spent on structural maintenance, £600,000 on highway structures and £660,000 and £367,000 on minor improvements and traffic management measures respectively.

Willie Clarke asked about EU funding. He will know, in relation to the east border region, that we have been making applications for priority 2 INTERREG funding that may be available for supporting collaboration on infrastructure. Roads Service is preparing a bid for a percentage of the €10 million available under priority 2 funding. However, it is important to note that three regions — Scotland, the North and the South — are competing for a percentage of that €10 million. The full amount will not be spent in a single region member state.

Caitríona Ruane asked about the route from Doran's Rock to Rowallane. Roads Service is developing proposals to improve a section of the A7 Downpatrick to Belfast link corridor between Doran's Rock and Rowallane, and a preliminary design has been drawn up. Works continue to refine and optimise the design, and it is planned to hold a public exhibition in due course to describe and explain the developing proposal and to obtain feedback from the local community.

Returning to the subject of the road between Downpatrick and Newry, I assure Members that considerable improvements have been made over the past five years. Resurfacing and strengthening works have been completed in the urban areas of the B8 at Newry and at rural sections near Hilltown, at Yellow Road, the Old Road, Clonduff Road and Goward Road. I assure Members that I am aware of the intricacies of the Seven Sisters, having cycled that route on more than one occasion.

Resurfacing work on the rural stretches of the A25 has also been completed in Castlewellan, Aughlisnafin, Moneyscalp Road, Ardnabannon Road and Ballybannon Road, as well as in urban sections of Downpatrick. The cost of completing that work has been in the region of £770,000, and further works are proposed on

that route at Sandy Street in Newry, Kilcoo and Mayobridge. Minor improvement works costing around £300,000 have also been completed at the B8 Kinghill Road junction, the A25 Burrenreagh junction and the A25 Vianstown Road. Further improvements are planned for routes at Haughey's Hill, Tobercorran Road and Ardnabannon Road. Traffic safety improvement measures have also been carried out over the past few years, particularly traffic calming at Kilcoo, Hilltown, Mayobridge and Castlewellan.

I am sure the House will agree that improving the road network across the North places huge demands on the budget. Careful consideration must be given to targeting schemes of greatest priority. Although resources must continue to go to the parts of the strategic road network that require attention, I assure Members that important maintenance and safety-related work will continue to be undertaken in other parts of the network, including the B8 and A25 Downpatrick to Newry Road, in line with policies and competing priorities.

Adjourned at 5.37 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 May 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Whitehouse Primary School

Mr Speaker: Mr Mervyn Storey has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22.

Mr Storey: I wish to present to the Assembly a public petition in relation to the delay in the rebuilding of Whitehouse Primary School and nursery unit in Newtownabbey, which, as Members know, was destroyed by fire on 18 July 2009. I am sure that the petitioners welcomed the Minister's announcement last Friday that it is now her intention to give the project the go-ahead. That is extremely welcome news for all concerned. However, having been asked to present the petition on behalf of the Committee and in light of the circumstances, I felt that it was only right and proper that the effort to collate some 6,000 petitions was reflected through the presentation of the petition to the House today.

The principal of Whitehouse Primary School presented the petition, which contains more than 6,000 signatures, to me, as Chairperson of the Committee for Education, on the afternoon of Wednesday 12 May. Some 200 parents, pupils and staff gathered at the front of Parliament Buildings. The Committee had previously agreed that I should accept the petition and present it to the Assembly on behalf of the Committee. The petition takes the form of a letter to the Minister of Education seeking a date on which building work on a new school for Whitehouse Primary will commence. I am happy to report to the House that the Minister's press release of Friday stated that work should begin in a few weeks. Therefore, Mr Speaker, I present the petition to you in accordance with Standing Orders. I can confirm that, contrary to what has

been suggested, the colours of the box do not represent either the SDLP or Glentoran Football Club. They are the proud colours of Whitehouse Primary School.

Mr Storey moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Education for information.

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: First Stage

The Minister for Social Development

(Ms Ritchie): I beg to introduce the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill [NIA 19/09], which is a Bill to make provision in relation to liquor licensing and registration of clubs.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/09] be agreed.

I begin by apologising for my late attendance in the Chamber on Monday 10 May, which necessitated the rescheduling of the Second Stage of this Bill. I hope that Members appreciate that it was not my intention to be discourteous to the Assembly in any way; rather, it was the fact that it took me longer than I had anticipated to get down to the Chamber and that the business of the House continued.

I assure the Member for East Antrim Mr Roy Beggs, who seems to be fixated on my movements and words, that my late attendance had nothing to do with double-jobbing. I notice that he is not in his place, which may be because he is doing one of his three jobs as a farmer, a local councillor and an Assembly Member. I assure him that I was not distracted by duties at Westminster. I was in Parliament Buildings, and it simply took me longer than I had anticipated to get to the Chamber. It had more to do with my lack of agility and the fact that the Minister of the Environment did not take as long as I thought that he would in his Second Stage debate. I apologise to the Assembly; I did not mean to be discourteous in any way.

The Bill proposes amendments to the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. That Order was intended primarily to allow the swift resolution of disputes by way of adjudication and to improve payment practices, issues that have long beset the construction industry. The 1997 Order derives from Part II of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 in England and Wales. Known as “the Construction Act”, that legislation had its origins in Sir Michael Latham’s 1994 seminal report ‘Constructing the Team’, which set out recommendations to improve the workings of the construction industry and to tackle its damaging adversarial culture through the promotion of greater integration and collaborative practice. In 2004, Sir Michael was asked to review the effectiveness of the Act. He concluded that, although, in the main, it worked well, some improvements would be helpful. A series of public consultations was carried out in GB, and detailed discussions were held with

various umbrella groups representing all parts of the industry. The ultimate outcome of those deliberations was a number of amendments to the Construction Act, set out in Part 8 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act, which received Royal Assent in November 2009.

While the amendments to the GB legislation were still being developed, my predecessor Nigel Dodds launched a public consultation on proposals to amend the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. That exercise was carried out between 8 April and 3 July 2009. The Department of Finance and Personnel's proposals, as set out in its consultation, closely reflected the amendments being put forward for the Construction Act at Westminster. That approach was adopted because the amendments being considered in GB reflected the outcome of extensive consultation with the construction industry and its clients over a number of years at national level. The amendments represented a distillation of proposals aimed at improving the operation of the Construction Act, while achieving a proper balance across the frequently conflicting interests in the industry. The changes also embraced the twin benefits of ensuring parity of legislation and securing a level playing field for the Northern Ireland construction industry, objectives seen as important prerequisites to any changes.

Although the response to the consultation was limited, DFP proposals were generally welcomed by the Northern Ireland construction industry. For example, what critical comment there was tended to reflect the view from one sector that we were not proposing sufficient change, while another sector expressed the view that matters between private contracting parties should not be subject to statutory intervention. Those differing viewpoints serve to underline the continuing need to promote balance between the diverse commercial interests of the various sectors of the construction industry.

The proposals in general attracted broad agreement, and there was emphatic support for the principle of the maintenance of parity with the ongoing amendments to the corresponding legislation in GB. For example, even in the case of a respondent disagreeing with a specific point, the response would be qualified by saying that, notwithstanding his point of view, parity with GB would be more important.

In considering how to approach the weaknesses that were identified in the current Order, three options were assessed. We could do nothing and rely entirely on guidance to the industry; we could target specified areas in which existing measures are seen not to be working effectively; or we could carry out extensive regulatory intervention. The measures that I propose in this amending Bill follow the approach taken in GB in seeking, where possible, to consolidate the already good track record of co-operation between the industry and government. I propose legislative intervention only in cases in which there is no realistic alternative. Essentially, these interventions will fine-tune the existing framework rather than make a wholesale change.

I turn to the content of the Bill and will quickly run through each of the clauses. Clause 1 removes the prohibition of the application of the 1997 Order to contracts that are wholly in writing. The courts have interpreted "wholly in writing" strictly and have determined that even contracts that were initially in writing but were subsequently varied by oral instruction fall outside the 1997 Order. That prohibition has led to disputes over contracts being excluded from the 1997 Order which otherwise would have benefited from being resolved through adjudication.

Clause 2 deals with the application of construction contracts. The 1997 Order currently defines "construction contract" and "construction operations" and contains an all-or-nothing power that allows the Department to disapply all of its provisions from certain types of contracts. I propose to amend the 1997 Order to enable the Department to disapply any, but not necessarily all, of the provisions. That approach will allow us to ensure that many of the valuable features of the 1997 Order, as amended by the Bill, can continue to apply; for instance, the right to stage payments, the right to adjudication and the right to suspend performance in the event of non-payment. It will also allow us to respond proportionally to future contractual innovation.

Clause 3 relates to the adjudicator's power to make corrections. I propose to require parties to a construction contract to provide for an adjudicator to have the power to correct any obvious clerical or arithmetical error in his or her decision — the so-called slip rule.

Clause 4 concerns adjudication costs. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and

Construction Act 2009, on which our public consultation was based, includes a provision that renders ineffective, with one exception, any agreement between contracting parties about the allocation of adjudication costs and expenses. That exception relates to instances where agreement is made in writing after one party has given notice to the other of its intention to refer a dispute to adjudication.

12.15 pm

During its passage through Parliament, the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill was amended to provide for a further exception. That amendment means that it will also be permissible for parties to contract, in writing, to allow the adjudicator to make his or her allocation of costs and expenses. Although views on that measure were not canvassed during the Department of Finance and Personnel's consultation, I propose to include that amendment because it represents good practice, and, most importantly, would maintain the goal of parity, which was already accepted by those who responded.

Clause 5 concerns the determination of payments due. I propose measures to clarify the requirements for contracts to include adequate mechanisms to determine what periodic payments become due under contract and how obligations under those contracts should be dealt with.

Clause 6 deals with notices that relate to payment. To deal with the issues of ambiguity and improve the transparency of the process, I propose detailed measures to address matters concerning the various mechanisms that relate to the issue of payment or withholding notices. The proposals make separate provision for instances in which the contracting parties have agreed that the duty to issue notices may lie with the payer, the payee or some third party. Accordingly, they also set out regimes for dealing with failure to issue notices on time or to make due payment.

Clause 7 deals with the requirement to pay the notified sum. In the interests of improving cash flow, I propose measures to make it a statutory requirement to pay the sum that is specified in payment notices, except in some circumstances; for example, insolvency. Clause 8 refers to the suspension of performance for non-payment. I propose to amend the provisions that relate to a contractor's remedies, including the right to

suspend work when due payments that have been properly notified have not been made.

The Bill comprises a number of separate amendments that relate to various measures in the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Principally, I propose to increase accessibility to the process of adjudication under that Order. That will allow disputes to be resolved without parties having to resort to more costly arbitration or litigation. The measures that I propose are also intended to improve cash flow in the industry by improving transparency of procedures and removing the ambiguity relating to the issue of notices and payment mechanisms. Those measures are intended to resolve shortcomings that have been observed in the working of the original GB legislation, which was replicated here in the 1997 Order. The proposals relate to important issues. If enacted, they will provide real and practical benefit to the construction industry in Northern Ireland.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McNarry):

The Committee Chairperson is unable to be here, so perhaps this is a first: my apologising for a Shinner. However, I assure the House that I am not setting a precedent. The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel is absent owing to another engagement.

Over the past two years, the Committee for Finance and Personnel has engaged with the Department on its plans to amend the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the associated Scheme for Construction Contracts in Northern Ireland Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. I will probably mention some matters that were raised by the Minister, but it is important that the feelings of the Committee are relayed to the House.

On 4 June 2008, the Committee received an initial briefing from DFP officials on the Department's plans to consult on proposals that were aimed at improving payment practices in the construction industry. Members heard that the proposals related to three broad areas: the adjudication process, the payment framework and the right to suspend performance. The aim of the proposals was to encourage parties to a construction contract to resolve disputes by adjudication, rather than by recourse to other options, such as litigation, which is very costly in time and money. The proposals were also

intended to provide greater transparency and clarity on payments. Members heard from the officials that, rather than wholesale reform, the proposals represent measured reform of adjudication and payment practices in existing legislation.

At its meeting on 30 September 2009, the Committee was apprised of the outcome of DFP's consultation. Members heard that the response to the consultation was modest, with only seven replies having been received. Given that similar amendments were going through Westminster at that time, departmental officials considered that the low response rate possibly reflected a supposition that the same amendments would subsequently be made here. In that respect, the Department's officials were keen to stress that full consideration would have been given to any alterations or changes that arose as a result of the consultation that DFP undertook. That said, the officials confirmed that respondents indicated support for maintaining parity with the position in the rest of the United Kingdom and that there was broad support for the proposals that were consulted on by DFP.

At its meeting on 21 April 2010, the Committee received a pre-introductory briefing on the draft Bill. DFP officials confirmed that the draft Bill's provisions differed only slightly from the proposals that were consulted on to reflect minor amendments that had been made to the corresponding GB legislation. Those changes related to the power to disapply any or all of the provisions in the 1997 Order with respect to descriptions of construction contracts as specified in the relevant Order and with respect to pre-dispute agreements on the allocation of adjudication fees.

During the evidence session, members asked whether removing the requirement for fully written contracts would, in fact, make an adjudicator's job more difficult, when the intention of the clause was to make the role easier. The departmental officials advised that, although contracts may be written initially, the majority of them evolve over the course of construction work and, therefore, many changes are not agreed in writing. Therefore, it was important to note that the removal of that requirement should broaden the adjudicator's role and his or her ability to deal with all aspects of a contract, whether written or verbal.

Committee members also questioned departmental officials further on the response to the consultation, raising a number of additional issues during the session, including the rationale for amending the legislation, adjudication fees and public procurement requirements. Overall, the Committee was generally satisfied with the briefings and the clarification that has been provided by the Department to date. During Committee Stage, members will engage with DFP officials and other stakeholders on the details of the Bill. In the meantime, I support the principles of the Bill and the motion, and I believe that that is the general view of Committee members.

Mr Hamilton: I speak in favour of the motion, and I echo Members' support for the principles of the Bill. I do so in particular because of the two main planks that the Minister offered as the thrust of the Bill: improving the payment process by attempting to inject clarity and transparency into the payment of moneys due in construction contracts, enabling, where possible, better cash-flow management and, secondly, the attempt to engender a less costly and time-consuming process for resolving disputes.

We all know the importance of the construction sector to the local economy, and that has been seen most acutely in the worst of times, rather than in the best of times, because that sector has borne the brunt of the economic downturn, whether in unemployment, loss of productivity or loss of skill sets. We have seen the construction sector suffer a great deal over the past 18 months to two years. Anything that the House can do, it should do. That could include approving the spending plans, which have offered great assistance to the construction sector, that the Minister and his colleagues brought forward for capital investment. Indeed, in some cases, that assistance represented the only work that people in the sector were able to get. We could also try to improve the process, which is what we are doing with this Bill, knowing as we do how important the sector is to our local economy.

I hear construction companies say regularly that, although the loss of business, the loss of contracts and the lack of contracts coming through the system is bad, poor cash flow is one of the biggest problems that they face. Any business may lose trade or business, but cash flow coming through will allow that business to be sustained, as that money will allow overheads

and costs to be paid and people to be kept in employment. If that cash flow is not coming through, it will be difficult to pay those bills, and it will make life difficult with the banks. The lack of cash flow is often the excuse that banks put forward for increasing fees or withdrawing facilities. Given that the sector depends very much on good cash-flow management, clause 5, which relates to determination of payments due, and clause 7, which relates to the requirement to pay a notified sum, are important. The clauses that are trying to improve the cash flow management of construction contracts are also important.

The House knows how expensive disputes over contracts can be to the public sector in time and money. We have seen many high-profile cases where disputes have cost the public sector in Northern Ireland a great deal of money and have delayed important construction contracts for a long time. When the Committee for Finance and Personnel examined the procurement process in Northern Ireland, it spent a lot of time concentrating on disputes, and it found how costly they can be to the public sector. Indeed, such disputes can also be costly to construction businesses. We should support any approach to get a more amicable solution to disputes over contracts, whether that be over the timeliness of payments or of jobs not performed. Therefore, I welcome the inclusion of the relevant clauses in the Bill.

Finally, the maintenance of parity with the rest of the United Kingdom is critical. As the Minister outlined, there was some dispute over some of the clauses during the public consultation. However, one theme that was constant throughout was that people in the sector wanted to see the maintenance of that parity. I also welcome the fact that, as the Minister said, this Bill is only for matters for which legislation is required; it is not a wholesale change of the whole system for the sake of it. Indeed, if such legislation is required, the Bill is the only option available to the Minister to improve the system of construction contracts. With that in mind, I welcome the Bill and support its Second Stage.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister and Mr McNarry, who spoke on behalf of the Finance Committee, comprehensively and expertly set out the Bill's intention. As a member of that Committee, I support Mr McNarry's remarks.

Sinn Féin recognises that there are too many possible scenarios of conflict or dispute to allow a total guarantee or reassurance to be given. However, we were given sufficient grounds to believe that the Bill's intention on transparency and expediting the process of dispute or conflict resolution and its ability to minimise the resort to legal redress is in the broad interests of the industry. Disputes affect not only the primary contractors but often the suppliers and those who rely on being able to provide services in the food chain and those who may have difficulty maintaining their necessary cash-flow levels.

Therefore, very briefly — I hope this will be the shortest speech that we will hear on the subject — this is a good Bill, which deserves the support of the Assembly.

12.30 pm

Mr O'Loan: I also support the Bill in principle. The Minister and the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel have told the House that the purpose of the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill is to amend the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. That Order was a replication of the Construction Act 1996, which sought to deal with the issue of payment practices in the construction industry in what was intended to be a final way; however, that has evidently not turned out to be the case. It was felt that amending legislation was required in Britain, and departmental officials here felt that the 1997 Order had the same weaknesses and advised that it should also be amended.

When officials gave evidence to the Committee on the Bill on 21 April 2010 they stated that:

"At the heart of the initiatives...were the concepts of partnering, collaboration and integrated teamworking".

They also said that they had:

"tried to eliminate any scope for lengthy disputes or poor payment practices, which have constantly bedevilled the industry."

They went on to say that:

"The Construction Act had been expected to enforce best practice to ensure a fair balance and commercial power throughout the demand and supply chain."

Although the original legislation was intended to do all those things, there is a perception

that it has not and that it needs to be amended to achieve the three principles of partnership, collaboration and teamworking; to resolve disputes by adjudication rather than by going through the courts; and to create a level playing field in any dispute, whether it is resolved by adjudication or by the courts. It is not entirely clear what way the dice are currently loaded, but there is some suggestion that the stakes are not evenly balanced in dispute situations.

I was somewhat concerned that the evidence that officials gave to the Committee and the answers that they gave to my specific questions indicated that there was a limited response to the consultation on the Bill, with only seven responses having been received. On the face of it, that would seem to indicate that there was not a groundswell of opinion; however, there may be more views beneath the surface, and I am also unsure whether there was a level playing field on the consultation. The public sector is often the client in those situations, and it has a very strong voice, having representative bodies that can articulate its case very professionally, and there are professional bodies in the construction industry that are equally capable of presenting their views. However, the private sector is much less structured, and even large firms may not have the capacity for or experience of engaging in that type of consultation. There are many small firms in the supply and construction sides of the industry that have not expressed their views. I have some concerns about that, which were not fully answered by officials, and I did not see enough evidence of a proactive attempt to consult key stakeholders, particularly those that I mentioned.

There are eight clauses in the Bill, which, as the Minister indicated, are quite technical in nature. Therefore, it is a perfect example of a Bill that we should support in principle, while welcoming the fact that the Committee will examine it in detail. Given the highly technical nature of the Bill, I cannot say that I am looking forward to that task with immense anticipation. However, it is one of the jobs of work that happen behind the scenes in the Assembly, and it will be very important to the entire construction industry. Considerable reference has been made to the need to maintain parity in the UK, and certain stakeholders have argued strongly for that. That point must be taken seriously, but many construction firms that operate in Northern Ireland also operate to a significant degree

in the South. Therefore, I ask the Minister whether the issue of parity with the South of Ireland has also been considered. It would be unfortunate if, in trying to maintain convergence with Britain, we were to diverge further from the equivalent legislation that applies in the Republic of Ireland. If the Minister were to address that point, I would be grateful, and we can also consider it in Committee. I give my broad support, in principle, to the legislation at Second Stage.

Dr Farry: I shall endeavour to make my contribution even shorter than that of Mitchel McLaughlin. The Alliance Party supports the legislation, which is largely technical. If the response to the consultation so far has been limited, that may be rectified in Committee. The Committee for Finance and Personnel will undertake that shortly and can tease out the detail. We should welcome and move forward with the principle of the legislation.

Given the particular economic challenges that face the construction sector not only in Northern Ireland but elsewhere, the legislation is timely. Prompt payment is important for the cash flow of all businesses, including those in the construction sector. I also recognise that cash flow is particularly important in the type of business environment in which many small firms and independent traders work.

Disputes about contracts cause delays, which have not only financial but economic costs, including lost opportunities to move forward. I suspect that the temptation for disputes to arise is even more acute in the context of an economic downturn, because of the pressures that businesses face in trying to survive in a difficult environment. I hope that the legislation will help to protect Northern Ireland from that.

Without straying too far into the next motion, I shall follow on from Declan O'Loan's comments on parity. It is important to recognise that the market in Northern Ireland is not and should not be viewed as a segment on its own, cut off from what is happening elsewhere in the UK or, indeed, the island of Ireland. It is important, in the first instance, that we follow what is happening at a UK-wide level but also that we recognise the all-island dimension. If there is divergence, we should use the forums available to us in Northern Ireland to create as much harmony as we can across these islands. Without harmony, we would be at a competitive disadvantage, because

our being out of step would create a barrier to companies from elsewhere working here. That would make it difficult to ensure that we receive best value not only in the private sector but in the public sector. Therefore, we have a strong economic and financial interest in ensuring that we improve the current regime as far as possible. Along with other Members, I look forward to discussing the Bill in greater detail in Committee.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank all Members who took part in the short debate on what some described as a complex issue. It has been a rather historic afternoon. Mr McNarry knows what I am going to say. I noted two points from his speech. He apologised for the Sinn Féin Chairman of the Committee, which must be a first. He started with one startling statement and concluded with an equally startling one, when he said that he totally supported the motion. It is a first for Mr McNarry to apologise for Sinn Féin and to support a DUP Minister. Although it will make this place less exciting and, probably, my job less enticing, I hope that he keeps taking the medicine that he took this morning, so that we get that combination.

Mr McNarry: That is my contribution to unionist unity. You have to play your part.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I suppose that that is right. It is his plank for unionist unity. I thought that I would remark on that before I started.

Mr McNarry and Mr O'Loan raised the issue of the limited response to the consultation. As Mr Farry pointed out, if there has been some defect and if people have either not had, not taken or missed the opportunity to respond to the proposals during the consultation, they will have an opportunity to do so during the Committee's investigation. One of the good things about devolution is that there is an opportunity for legislation to be properly scrutinised, and people can come along and express their views to those who will make the decision about the legislation.

I must say in defence of the Department that, as well as meeting all the other statutory requirements, it notified over 40 bodies that will be dealing with the relevant issues that the legislation was being proposed and gave them the opportunity to respond. We received only seven responses. When similar legislation was being dealt with in GB, 71 responses

were submitted, and one of those was from a Northern Ireland-based body. Only 13 responses were submitted for Scotland. Proportionally, therefore, we had about one tenth of the responses that were received for GB as a whole, so one might argue that we had a proportionally higher response rate than other parts.

Mr O'Loan also said that very few responses were received from SMEs, an area that will be affected by the legislation. I do not think that any SMEs responded, but the Member will know that many smaller businesses tend to look to their central organisations, which are better equipped and have better expertise, to deal with consultation responses on their behalf. I suspect that many of their views were incorporated in the collective responses from the bigger bodies. There will be an opportunity to be heard during the Bill's Committee Stage, and it will be interesting to see whether some of those who did not make their voices known during the consultation will want to come to the Committee and speak about it.

We have tried to reflect those views in the legislation. As I said in my opening speech, the central plank was, first, to maintain parity, for which there was a demand; secondly, not to introduce an over-prescriptive statutory requirement on firms; and, thirdly, to try to identify where issues had arisen with the defects in the Construction Contracts (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and to address those, and we have tried to do that.

One other point to come through was the importance of the Bill to the industry. Cash flow is important at this time. The parts of the Bill that deal with notification of payments being issued, with the requirement for those payments to be made and with allowing a wider range of people to issue those notices and the requirements in contracts such as the requirement that the default position will be adopted in respect of any contract for which there is no notice will help businesses to ensure that they get paid on time for work that they have specified. Of course, they will have to specify the work and justify the claim that was made. Transparency and cash flow are important.

Furthermore, the adjudication process will help many small firms that cannot afford the costs of litigation and of employing barristers and experts to go to court. One Member mentioned

the adjudication process and fees. Anyone who is entering that process, if they have any sense, will ask the adjudicator to lay down their daily fee and the length of time that the work is likely to take. There will be a limit to the amount of time as well.

12.45 pm

It has been a useful debate. There is general assent, but, as some Members have said, that may be due to the technical nature of the Bill and the fact that Members have not gone into all the potential issues. However, knowing the Committee, I am sure that it will do that during the Committee Stage.

I thank Members for taking part in the debate and for the way that they have worked with the officials. I note that the Deputy Chairman recognised that the engagement with officials to date has been useful. That is the way that it should be, and I hope that that will continue throughout the Committee Stage. I commend the Second Stage of the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/09] be agreed.

Forestry Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Forestry Bill.

Moved. — [The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew).]

Mr Speaker: As no amendments have been selected, there is no opportunity to discuss the Forestry Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at Final Stage. Further Consideration Stage is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Economic Regeneration

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. 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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Butler: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to explore, through the North/South Ministerial Council, ways to develop policies in conjunction with the Irish Government which benefit both economies on the island, with particular consideration being given to the potential benefits of the harmonisation of VAT rates, taxation systems and corporation tax; and further calls on the Executive to work with the Irish Government to develop an all-island economic recovery and development plan, aligned with an investment strategy, to help address the adverse impacts of the present economic climate.

Tá mé an-sásta a bheith ag caint faoin rún sa díospóireacht seo inniu, agus tá súil agam go mbeidh an Tionól ag tabhairt tacaíochta di. The amendment to the motion is acceptable. I do not see anything wrong with it, and it does not take away from the overall motion. Therefore, as far as our party is concerned, we accept the amendment.

The case for an all-Ireland approach to economic regeneration should, first of all, be non-party political. The case for closer economic links has to centre on the benefits that that will bring to the people we represent. The most compelling reason is that it makes economic sense to work together on this small island to help to better everyone, including the business community, those who are employed, those who are unemployed and have lost their job in the recent economic downturn and those who are about to enter the workforce.

All the economies on these islands face difficult times. The Twenty-six Counties has experienced huge job losses and cuts in public expenditure. The British economy is about to experience deep cuts in the public sector, as it attempts to

deal with one of the worst recessions that it has witnessed in modern times, while the North's economy, as the Assembly knows only too well, has felt the worst effects of the recession in job losses and an increase in unemployment.

The case for an all-Ireland approach to economic matters has been made strongly by the Government, the business communities in both jurisdictions and trade unions. Independent research and reports also demonstrate the benefits of an all-Ireland approach to economic regeneration. In 2007, for example, the then chairman of Ulster Bank, Sir George Quigley, stated that the Assembly should promote an all-Ireland economy through a single joined-up effective agency, with the IDA and Invest NI no longer competitors but fully collaborative.

The Economic Reform Group's research shows that there are increased opportunities for cross-border economic development. It found that one in six firms in the North of Ireland and one in twelve in the South engage in cross-border co-operation. The Irish Government's 'National Development Plan 2007-13' states that:

"All-island collaboration offers a unique and relatively unexploited source of competitive advantage for both the North and the South."

The 'Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy', which was commissioned by the British and Irish Governments in 2006, is one of the most extensive reports on the development of the country's economy. The report examined the strategic context for North/South economic co-operation and looked at the strategic rationale and economic basis for all-Ireland collaboration. The Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) have a joint business initiative that aims to enhance co-operation and improve competitiveness for businesses in both the North and the South.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) represents the country's trade union movement and works with other organisations, such as government and business agencies, to develop all-Ireland economic prosperity for its members. There have also been concrete benefits from all-Ireland economic co-operation, which include major investment by both Governments that is projected to be in the region of €100 billion or £68 billion in a 10-year period. The Irish Government have committed major investment to key strategic cross-border routes, such as

those between Dublin and Belfast, between Derry and Letterkenny and between Sligo and Enniskillen. They have provided nearly €8 million to assist the development of the City of Derry Airport.

The North's economy has potential to improve if economic activity and policies are developed on an all-Ireland basis. A considerable market of six million people exists in this country to develop such policies. Since the Good Friday Agreement, trade between the two parts of the island has steadily increased. Thousands of businesses from all over the island trade with each other daily. Hundreds of thousands of people live their life on both sides of the border; they reside in one jurisdiction but shop, study or work on the other.

Economic planning and development on the island has been carried out in a back-to-back fashion for many decades. Due to lack of joined-up development in areas such as road, rail, air and sea transport, businesses have suffered reduced economic opportunity. Constant fluctuations in VAT, corporation tax, excise duty and currency have created barriers to economic development on both sides of the border. Further research and analysis should be carried out into the benefits of having one currency — the euro — on the island of Ireland.

There have been many positive developments as regards all-Ireland co-operation. The all-Ireland energy market has provided for a competitive, sustainable and reliable electricity and gas market. The recent announcement by regulatory authorities on both sides of the border of a move towards the harmonisation of electricity and gas prices on the island is a welcome development. Alignment of the two markets will reduce supply costs, raise customer service standards and attract new investors. InterTradelreland, which was set up under the Good Friday Agreement, has developed many North/South business opportunities. Since 2003, more than 1,300 businesses from across the island of Ireland have benefited from its help in creating jobs and generating trade.

The opportunities and benefits of all-Ireland economic planning have never been more pressing, given the present economic climate facing both economies. In particular, the North's economy will continue to be underdeveloped because of its dependence on and domination by the British economy. It has no fiscal

independence or power to raise taxes, which means that the North's regional economy is overdependent on the public sector to create employment. The North has always been peripheral to strategic economic planning by the British Exchequer, with decisions in London inevitably reflecting the economic needs of the south-east of Britain. The recent Westminster election underlined how far down the list of the British Government's priorities the North is: it was not mentioned even once during the election campaign, and, when David Cameron mentioned it, it was to say how many cuts he would make in the North if he became Prime Minister.

An issue on which there has been some convergence of opinion recently among the political parties here is corporation tax. Although positions may differ on the actual rate, there is clear consensus across the political and economic spectrum that corporation tax needs to be harmonised across the island. Developing the island's attractiveness to international investment should be a key priority for the North/South Ministerial Council. Working through the NSMC, we must place the focus on enhancing the island's business environment and securing maximum collaboration in export promotion. There must at least be enhanced collaboration between the IDA and Invest NI in promoting the island for inward investment, but both bodies should eventually be merged into a single inward investment agency for the island of Ireland. More work should also be done through the NSMC to remove obstacles to mobility between both jurisdictions. The recent development of a dedicated cross-border mobility website to help people who want to move across the border to live, work or study is to be welcomed.

The need for a skilled all-Ireland workforce is a key resource for a more prosperous all-Ireland economy. The NSMC needs to consider how we can build on the all-island skills study report and improve the all-island skills base so that it contributes to all-Ireland economic development.

Resolving outstanding political matters arising from the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement has dominated politics in the North for the past number of years.

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

Mr Butler: Now we have an opportunity to turn our focus and attention to developing economic policies for the benefit of everyone. Go raibh maith agat.

Dr McDonnell: I beg to move the following amendment: Insert after "corporation tax;"

"calls for the full implementation of the November 2001 cross-border 'Study of Obstacles to Mobility' report commissioned by the North/South Ministerial Council;"

It is a privilege to move the amendment. I thank Mr Butler, Ms McCann and Mr McLaughlin for tabling the motion. It is an excellent motion, and I am trying to add a minor amendment to widen it and make it practical. The motion recognises that, at any time, we should be trying to create as much flexibility and mobility in our economy as possible. It recognises that flexibility and mobility are particularly important at this time because of the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. The SDLP amendment focuses not just on identifying the problem and discussing it but on doing something practical about it.

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

The amendment refers to a study that was carried out at the request of the NSMC in 2001. The study set out to do a number of things. Its terms of reference were:

"To identify the obstacles to the mobility of persons, in either direction, between North and South on the island of Ireland, including: persons living in one jurisdiction and working, or seeking to work, in the other; persons who have lived and worked in one jurisdiction but who either have moved, or wish to do so, to live and work in the other jurisdiction; students whose original residence is in one jurisdiction but who are studying, or wish to do so, in the other jurisdiction; and persons who have lived in one jurisdiction and now live, or wish to do so, in the other jurisdiction, without working for remuneration."

The study was also asked to assess the obstacles to people's mobility in key areas, including direct and indirect taxation; vehicle importation and registration; social security; pensions; health; education; training; recognition of qualifications; employment law; housing; and childcare. In other words, the study had a wide remit. It was also asked to consider and recommend ways in which barriers might be eliminated in either the public or private sectors as appropriate. After long deliberations, it

reached a number of conclusions that I wish to draw to Members' attention.

1.00 pm

The study accepted the fact that a wide range of obstacles affected people's mobility across several sectors. I am acutely aware of that through my work in the medical profession and, in some cases, through my dealings with students. The recommendations dealt with those obstacles. Individuals and companies also face obstacles to mobility. For example, a combination of factors may adversely affect a decision to move. These are gloomy days, but, not so long ago, we could have removed some of those obstacles if we had taken a big slice of the financial services sector into east Belfast. The obstacles faced were found to affect lower income groups adversely and disproportionately. The costs of those obstacles are borne by individuals and companies across the spectrum. The problems that we face are not unique to Northern Ireland or the island of Ireland as a whole. Countries across Europe face similar frontier issues in respect of the economy and the restrictions that affect the way in which people operate and do business. Finding solutions to those obstacles requires various efforts from providing information to legislating.

I wish to provide more minor detail about some, not all, of the recommendations. The study made 50 recommendations on information sharing; taxation; pensions; social security benefits; health, which is a big issue for me; childcare; housing; transport; education; training and employment; and telecoms, which affects us all because of roaming charges. If my friend Mr Campbell visits somewhere such as Magilligan in his constituency, he may suddenly be hit with high roaming charges for using his mobile. We are all hit with such rates if we are within 10 miles of the border; telephone companies rip us off. The study also made recommendations about banking and insurance, and, my God, I am sorry that we did not take up some of those recommendations a few years back before the current crisis.

I wish to provide some detail about the recommendation on taxation. The study recommended that information be shared between the North and the South and that a joined-up approach be taken to taxation so that people are not taxed twice. Quite often, individuals who work in the North but live

across the border and vice versa pay tax in both jurisdictions on the money that they earn. Vehicle registration taxation is very high in the South, yet someone who lives in the South but works in the North must buy a car in the South and register it there. I mentioned double taxation, and the study recommended better tax reliefs. It also recommended that pensions be co-ordinated to ensure that people who move either North or South fit in. The study also recommended that social security benefits be integrated. The fact that information is not free-flowing creates difficulties for many honest people and opportunities for those who want to claim benefits fraudulently on both sides of the border. This extends, I am told, not just to Northern Ireland/Ireland but to those who wish to defraud the social security system by travelling from various cities in the English midlands to Dublin and vice versa.

There are a range of issues that we need to come to terms with. There is little political sensitivity involved, and, in many cases, it is a question of good management.

There is a very strong case — it is in the North's interest — for allowing people access to healthcare on either side of the border. I want Northern hospitals to accept Southern insurance, because, for example, where a new hospital is being built in Enniskillen, Fermanagh, that could bolster the hospital and make it more sustainable.

The cost of housing was a major problem and, although it may have eased quite a bit, access to finance is, nevertheless, much more difficult. There is a clear need for a cross-border loan scheme that takes into account the fact that many people from Belfast travel or move to Dublin to work for a period of time and, equally, that people move in the other direction. Due to an oversupply in housing, there may not be a lot going on at the moment in the Dublin and Southern building scene. However, at the time of the big boom in the construction industry, Northern Ireland builders needed better access to Southern projects.

I draw attention to the need for an all-island transport strategy. God knows, with the volcanic ash cloud that is hovering over us, those of us who have to go to another place this week are not sure whether we will get there. There must be significant improvement on roads that serve both jurisdictions, such as the Omagh-

Ballygawley road or the Omagh-Aughnacloy road, which are very important. There has been some co-operation; however, it is important that that is sustained. Cross-border air and rural bus services all feed into the transport strategy.

I could talk at length about education and training, in which there needs to be mutual respect for qualifications. I am particularly concerned that, for some reason, the senior medical training boards in London have decided that doctors, consultants, physicians and surgeons from Belfast, who, traditionally, have taken their exams through the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, somehow or other do not possess the necessary qualifications.

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

Dr McDonnell: In many cases, in real terms, those qualifications are very good, if not better than those that are needed.

I could talk about banking and insurance. However, I have made my point through all that I have listed. I am glad to propose the amendment and to support the motion.

Mr Campbell: The mover of the motion from Sinn Féin indicated at the outset that this issue is not party political. I suppose, in some respects, he is correct but only in respect of the party aspect. It may not be party political, but this issue is most definitely political. It appears that the acumen that devised this proposal is similar to that which we heard expressed by the deputy First Minister on Friday, when, in the company of the First Minister, he attempted to have a "Well done, David" moment. Fortunately, that backfired, as one hopes that this motion will. We will oppose the motion and the amendment for precisely those political reasons.

I have no difficulty with neighbouring countries, particularly those with no language barriers, co-operating to their mutual benefit. It would be patently absurd to create artificial barriers to beneficial proposals that could impact on the lives of people in either state. However, that is not what the motion is about.

People in Northern Ireland were not enamoured of the idea of going into an all-Ireland economy when the Celtic tiger was leaping and bounding ahead, so why on earth would anyone think that we would be more minded to go into one now? Last month, unemployment in the Republic hit

13.4%, which happens to be about double the unemployment rate in Northern Ireland. There are 432,000 people unemployed in the Irish Republic, and, according to many economic commentators, were it not for outward migration to the United Kingdom, more than half a million people would be unemployed. Despite that, the proposer of the motion wants us to join a banal scenario, which would leave us in an even worse situation.

Often, when comments are made about proposals such as that in the motion, criticism of those comments begins with the accusation that the unionist who opposes the proposal is looking over his or her shoulder at the TUV. Normally, that is what is said. That cannot be said today. It is also normally said that the comments are being made because there is an election coming. That cannot be said today. There is no electoral or TUV reason behind the comments that I am about to make. Some of us make such comments before, during and after elections, and we do not change. Some people need to wake up, smell the coffee and move into the twenty-first century, because people in Northern Ireland will not vote to move into some sort of all-island economy. In fact, there is much talk about referenda. I would be delighted to hear about a referendum in the Irish Republic that would ask whether the public would favour an all-island economy if it were to cost everyone £2,000 a year, every year for the rest of their life. I would dearly love to see that question in a referendum and to see the answer.

Last year, construction output in the Irish Republic fell by 32%. Capital investment fell by 28%. Politically, the issue of an all-Ireland economy is a dead end, and it is going nowhere economically. Northern Ireland and the Republic need to co-operate, and we need to do so on a basis that benefits the people here initially; if people in the Irish Republic derive benefit from it, so well and so good.

Mr Kennedy: Like the previous Member who spoke, after reading the motion, I was struck by the sentiments that drive the call for harmonised economic policies north and south. The sentiments were exactly that — sentiments. They may be nationalist or national sentiments, but they are sentiments that are driven by political dogma rather than economic imperatives or even common sense.

There are many ways in which the economies of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic interface and interdepend. Over the past few days, the people who will sit on the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee of NAMA have been named. We also heard that up to 150 developers from Northern Ireland will have £4 billion worth of loans that were taken out during the property boom, transferred to NAMA. NAMA was established by the Irish Government to buy and manage debt held by Dublin-based banks after house prices crashed. It was also revealed that a number of Northern Ireland developers owe NAMA in the region of £100 million each. Of course, the economies of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic are, therefore, intertwined. However, despite that, our economy in Northern Ireland remains deeply wedded to the United Kingdom economy.

1.15 pm

Northern Ireland manufacturing sales for 2008-09, the last year available, totalled about £16.2 billion. Of that, some £12.5 billion was overseas trade. Out of that overseas total, almost £6 billion went outside the UK, which means that our annual manufacturing trade with the UK is worth some £6.6 billion. That is well over 53% of the total manufacturing overseas trade and some 44% of total manufacturing sales. Sales to the Irish Republic account for 10.4% of total manufacturing sales and 28.6% of manufacturing exports. In addition, exports to the Irish Republic are falling year on year and fell in value in 2008-09 by some 9%. There is no question, therefore, about the identity of our major trading partner: it is the rest of the United Kingdom by a considerable margin, and the proposers of the motion would do well to take note of that.

Of course, that does not mean that corporation tax should not be reduced. Of course it should, and my party proposed that, along with the creation of an enterprise zone covering the whole of Northern Ireland, as a means of achieving a rebalancing of our public and private sector work imbalance. The aim, therefore, should be a reduction in corporation tax not a harmonisation. If that is the result, well and good, but the motivation must be reduction not harmonisation. The call for harmonisation is just another example of Sinn Féin trying to claim credit for a reduction in corporation tax as if it were designed to bring us into the orbit of an Irish economy. Heaven forbid that we should

queue up to join one of the problem economies of the European Union, which does not even share our currency, although how long it may be allowed to remain in the euro zone remains to be seen. We take no pleasure in that, but those are the simple, economic facts.

Therefore, Sinn Féin need not try to present the issue as one of harmonisation with the Irish Republic. It is not. It is only the creation of a level playing field with a competitor economy that for years used its corporate tax policy to attract inward investment and to mount what amounted to unfair competition with our efforts to attract inward investment. We do not agree with or subscribe to Northern Ireland being part of an all-Ireland recovery plan, not because we do not respect the Irish Republic or wish it well but because we are predominantly part of the UK economy and our economic recovery is bound inextricably to that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, we will oppose the motion and the amendment.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party welcomes the debate. It is with some regret however, that we cannot support the motion, because it goes way too far in talking about fiscal harmonisation on the island of Ireland, which would be at the expense of the current fiscal harmonisation with the rest of the UK. It is an either/or choice. The position is similar with regard to what Mr Butler said about potential monetary harmonisation. The SDLP amendment is, in itself, fine, and identifies an area in which there are barriers to be overcome. However, it does not alter the fundamental thrust of the motion, which, as I said, goes way too far. We tabled our own amendment, which preferred a more balanced approach, but, regrettably, that was not taken up.

It is important to disassemble the economic, financial and monetary aspects of the motion and look at them separately. There are areas where we should be doing more. However, there are also areas where there are important limitations and restrictions. We should recognise those and, in some cases, keep them in place for good, sound economic reasons, leaving aside the political arguments that were made.

There is scope for economic co-operation and mutual development. A certain segmentation of markets exists on the island of Ireland, and there is scope for much better integration. That would be to everyone's benefit, not least to the consumers who would benefit from the

integration of prices. There is potential for the development of particular clusters, such as the green economy and tourism. We can market ourselves on an all-island basis in some respects.

We should invest further in the infrastructure of energy, transport, communications and information technology. We should also consider how best to harmonise the regulatory environment to provide a more competitive situation for investment. Overall, much more can be done on the economic front. Equally, however, we must be realistic about all-island competition. We offer different investment products, and there will, inevitably, be competition for the location of investment on the island of Ireland. Naturally, we will try to attract investment to Northern Ireland. To do that, we need to take various measures, not least of which is the reduction in corporation tax. However, even if we were to have an all-island approach to investment, the notion that we would benefit from that is somewhat flawed.

Even before the Celtic tiger got into difficulty, the Dublin Government were talking about encouraging financial services companies to come up to Northern Ireland. Those opportunities were at the tail end of the investment and could not easily be accommodated in Dublin, but there were back office ventures that could have gone to Belfast. They were not at the top end of the investments but at the lower end. There is and always will be competition. That said, I would not dismiss the Celtic tiger too readily, despite its difficulties. I disagree with Danny Kennedy: there is no prospect that the Republic of Ireland will be forced out of the euro. The Irish economy has strengths and will, no doubt, rebound in the near future.

The Alliance Party is much more worried about what the motion says about fiscal and monetary matters. I look forward to the UK joining the euro. That will not happen during this Parliament, but, in the longer term, the UK should join. Northern Ireland cannot join the euro independently of the rest of the UK. The motion implies full-scale tax harmonisation, but I am afraid that that is a financial fantasy. The stark reality is that, leaving aside the politics, Northern Ireland has to be part of a wider UK system. Our tax base is simply far too small to support public services and economic development. Some 40% of our expenditure is supported in that way. To become much more financially sustainable, we

must challenge and overcome that situation, but it will not happen overnight.

We must also challenge UK regional policy. Simply speaking, it is much easier for 60 million people across the UK to support the current situation than it is for a nation of four million people to do so. We support tax-varying powers for the Assembly but only in the context of a divergence from the rest of UK policy rather than the full fiscal autonomy for which others seem to be arguing. Fiscal autonomy with the Republic is not a realistic option. From a financial point of view, opportunities exist for the better provision of public services and for greater co-operation in that regard. The border clearly distorts how we provide our services.

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

Dr Farry: We can consider that matter in a constructive manner in the months and years to come.

Lord Browne: I oppose the motion and the amendment because they reflect misguided nationalist aspirations, rather than making economic common sense. Any Sinn Féin or SDLP Members who have read the financial pages of the newspapers over the past few weeks must realise that their adamant opposition to any spending cuts is viewed as political nonsense in the Irish Republic. Are they not aware that, in the Republic, the ratio of the annual Budget deficit to GDP is the highest in the euro zone and that the European Commission proposes to impose financial penalties on any state that fails to meet the 3% deficit requirement? In those circumstances, were the Irish Government to embark on the kind of all-Ireland economy recovery and development plan that the motion proposes, that would inevitably involve a substantial increase in public spending. The Republic could risk financial penalties or even expulsion from the euro zone.

Although the parties opposite may be loath to accept it, the Northern and Southern economies have drifted apart in recent years. The UK has retained the freedom to set its own interest rate and exchange rate policies, while the Republic has surrendered control of those policies to Brussels. As a result, the UK enjoys much greater flexibility in planning for economic recovery. To suggest that the Executive should

draw up common economic policies with the Irish Government is totally inappropriate.

Members know that the harmonisation of tax rates and systems is a long-term policy objective of the European Commission. However, progress has been limited, and tax competition still exists among member states. Indeed, the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced his intention to bring forward proposals to promote the growth of private sector business in Northern Ireland. If the proposed measures include increased investment incentives or a reduction in the rate of corporation tax, they might promote healthy competition between North and South in attracting investment. Such a tax competition would be more beneficial to Northern Ireland than any attempt to harmonise tax rates.

Recovery from the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression is still fragile, and this is not the time to embark on grandiose economic plans that neither the Irish nor UK Governments can afford.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment.

I listened intently to the Member for East Derry. I always try to pick some sense out of his remarks, but, in this case, I found it impossible to do so. His only rationale for opposing the motion and the amendment is that they are political. That is why we are here: to talk politics. He offered no notion of how the DUP would deal with unemployment, high levels of deprivation, including poor health and inadequate housing, or the unacceptably low quality of life and living standards for those on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Let us face facts: before there was a global crisis, before the Tories and the Lib Dems got into power and before we had 30 or 40 years of British direct rule, the economy here did not work. It was always a basket case. Let us deal with the logic. We are on a land mass. We are not arguing for a united Ireland. Obviously, our party is for a united Ireland. We think that that is the best solution, and, in time, perhaps the Member for East Derry and others will come round to the logic of that position.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Adams: No, Danny, thanks.

We are arguing for harmonisation. We are arguing for common-sense relationships, which the three parties that have spoken against the motion signed up to in the Good Friday Agreement, the St Andrews Agreement and the Hillsborough agreement. We are trying to stitch together things that are of benefit to ordinary citizens.

Two years ago, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Nigel Dodds, acknowledged that the Executive have only a limited set of levers under their control to manage the economy. For me, the rationale is that we should have more control. We should have more sets of levers.

There needs to be a two-pronged approach, with new ideas, solutions and strategies. That approach involves dealing with the British Government to get as much control over as many levers as possible to manage the economy and working with the Irish Government through the Executive and the North/South Ministerial Council. This is about getting down to business and dismissing ideas not because they are political but because they are not practical and will not work. It is about harmonising VAT rates, looking at taxation systems, agreeing a single rate of corporation tax and eliminating all barriers to workers' mobility throughout the island. It is about not having two competing agencies, Invest NI and the IDA, arguing and competing with each other.

It also means —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Adams: No thanks.

It also means that the same assistance that is given to foreign investors should be available to local businesses.

The Irish Academy of Engineering, in partnership with InterTradelreland, recently published a report called 'Infrastructure for an island population of 8 million'. That report, which the DUP will ignore to its cost, deals with projections for the island for the next 10 years or so, and it maps out some of what it thinks will happen. One projection is that there will be eight million people on the island, with four million living along the Belfast/Dublin corridor. The report states that appropriate infrastructure investment along that corridor will allow us to compete with other major European zones. It also argues for major infrastructure

investment in growth city regions of Ireland, including Belfast, Newry, Enniskillen and Derry. No Members on the Benches opposite objected when the Irish Government came forward with investment for the big infrastructural roads around the A4 and the A8.

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

Mr Adams: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

1.30 pm

Mr Elliott: I will provide clarification for Mr Adams on his last point. I certainly did object to Republic of Ireland investment for the A5 project, simply because I thought that the concept was wrong. It is clear that Sinn Féin Members are trying to impose some sort of all-Ireland economic state. The electorate in the South of Ireland rejected their proposals, so they are trying to impose them up here.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I have just started, but I will give way.

Mr Campbell: Does the Member accept that there is some benefit to be had by people who pay taxes in Northern Ireland and then buy and build holiday homes in Donegal?

Mr Elliott: I am sure that that is right, and I am happy to listen to the Member if he wants to elaborate on that point.

I have no difficulty with co-operation. Co-operation is needed in many areas, but we must accept the reality that we are often in competition with each other. I visited a factory in my constituency recently. Its management team told me that they did not want an all-Ireland economic situation. Indeed, I assume that some members of that team support the party on the opposite Benches that moved the motion. The company can label some of its products "UK", and, as it also has an office in Drogheda, it can label other products "Ireland". That gives the company the distinct advantage of marketing its products in places where each of those labels clearly has a better marketable value. Around 70% of that company's market is in the UK. It wants a UK label because products that are totally Irish would not have the same value. However, it can market the other 30% in the Republic of Ireland and other parts of Europe where the Irish label may be more attractive.

There is a strong case for reducing corporation tax in Northern Ireland to bring it into line with that in the Republic of Ireland. Although it would cost the Executive initially, such a move has the potential to transform our local economy and to make the island much more competitive. However, for two simple reasons the Ulster Unionist Party will not support the motion. In the first instance, we cannot support the political motivations behind it, and our second reason is based on the economic and fiscal reality that we face today. This motion calls for the harmonisation of tax systems between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. How exactly would that work? The motion ignores the annual £9 billion difference between tax take and public spending in Northern Ireland. As a region, until we successfully grow our private sector, we rely on being a part of the strong United Kingdom economy to maintain public services, and that means being a part of the United Kingdom's tax system.

The motion also ignores the fact that the euro zone is in complete turmoil. It disregards the multibillion euro payout for Greece and the subsequent and even more expensive rescue package for the threatened single currency. The Republic of Ireland makes up one of the four countries known as the PIGS — Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain — which are the potential recipients of such a rescue package. There is growing frustration and anger in Germany and a belief that the German taxpayer and economy are holding together those four countries and the future of the currency itself. However, the offshoot of what has happened is that there is likely to be much greater centralisation of tax and fiscal policies in Brussels.

The president of the European Central Bank has stated that there will have to be profound changes to the oversight of fiscal policies in the euro zone. The euro zone is in serious difficulties, and Sinn Féin and the SDLP want us to harmonise our tax system with that of one of the weakest euro zone countries.

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

Mr Elliott: In order to get Europe's deficit under control, the Republic this year will cut the pay of public sector workers by up to 8%.

Mr Deputy Speaker: My apologies. Mr Elliott has an extra minute.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Republic will also make cuts of some €760 million to welfare, and child benefit will be cut by up to €16 million per month. Such actions have caused Mr Adams to suggest that the Irish Government have failed the people.

Mr McCallister: Does the Member agree that it is strange to hear Sinn Féin MPs and MLAs arguing that the Brits should pump more money into Northern Ireland, and yet Sinn Féin wants us to harmonise with the Republic of Ireland, which is cutting its Budget wholesale?

Mr Elliott: Because only a short time remains to me, I will cut to the chase. Perhaps the one option for tax harmonisation is to bring the Republic into the sterling zone. I have not heard that suggested by Members on the Benches opposite, but it may be the logical conclusion.

Mr Attwood: In this debate and in similar ones in recent months on the Budget Bill and on European funding, it seems that we miss the wood for the trees. Let me explain what I mean. Paul Butler rightly said that the need to join up economic activity on the island of Ireland has never been more pressing. Life has changed, changed utterly, as a result of the global recession. Alasdair McDonnell rightly said that we should be doing something practical about it. As I see it, both motion and amendment try to merge those themes: a pressing need and a need to do something about it. That is all that the motion does.

Gregory Campbell rightly differentiated between the political and the party political. The election is over now. Given the pain that may be coming and in view of what NAMA said last week about the toxic assets on its books in the northern part of the island of Ireland, which total up to €5 billion, we need to shake ourselves. We must step back from the potential party politics around this issue and, as things have never been more pressing and in view of what Alasdair McDonnell said about doing something practical, consider whether there is the opportunity to do so. If we do not make that judgement call positively, then, in the view of the SDLP and of a vast range of other people well beyond party politics, we will regret it at our leisure.

In previous debates in this Chamber, I referred to the fact that the head of an economic agency in the North told the SDLP a number of months

ago that, in his view, there were only 10 years to get North/South right. I have not said previously who that person was, and people may have a view about him. However, at a recent conference I referred to that fact again, and that person was in the audience and acknowledged afterwards that he had said that to me. That person was David Gavaghan. He has left the SIB, but in his view we had only 10 years to get the North/South economic relationship right. Therefore, do not listen to Paul Butler, Alasdair McDonnell or anybody else whose agenda may be party political; listen to the likes of David Gavaghan, who told me that the island of Ireland — North and South — is in danger of losing its economic position because of the economic growth of the East, coupled with the fact that countries in South America, with a combined population of one billion, are about to start competing in the global market in the way that India, China and Korea have done in the past 10 or 20 years. That will happen as the global market moves and accelerates in a way that we have not seen, even in relation to the Chinese, the Indians and the Koreans.

David Gavaghan went further by saying that, if we do not get it right in the next 10 years, Dublin and Belfast will suffer more. I hope that David Gavaghan forgives me for making those points. I do not wish to drag him into a party political debate, but I want to make a point about what people with an insight on such matters are saying. I could quote many other people — the heads of banks, economic agencies and businesses — who share that belief, and that is the argument that unionism and unionist Ministers must begin to address.

Whatever about harmonising taxes and the other worthwhile proposals in the amendment, Governments North and South have commissioned research over the past 10 years that has produced a body of evidence that is a starting point for doing what the SDLP believes should be done on a North/South basis. Paul Butler referred to the all-Ireland skills study. Alasdair McDonnell referred to a report into mobility that was commissioned 10 years ago. There is also a health report containing 37 recommendations on how to join up North/South health provision to improve front-line services, save money and improve the welfare of our people in the North and South. Those are practical, operational, real value proposals.

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

Mr Attwood: That should be the starting point, not the end point. If we do not take that opportunity now that the election is out of the way, Gregory Campbell, we will not forgive ourselves.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I thank the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Butler, who proposed the motion, which is timely and fits in with the work that the Committee has embarked on to regenerate our economy. Addressing such issues is of great value. I think that everyone is united on the need for corporation tax in Northern Ireland to be reduced to a level that coincidentally if not deliberately matches that in the Republic.

Does my friend want to intervene?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He is right in the first part of what he said: there is unanimity across the Chamber about the need for and the desirability of a reduction in corporation tax. However he is aware that that involves two issues: first, to what new rate, and, secondly, what will we have to pay before benefiting from that decision?

1.45 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I felt that there was consensus, certainly among economists if not politicians, that lowering the rate of corporation tax was desirable because we share one island, our economies are interlinked and greater investment in both jurisdictions would be of net benefit to both economies. Direct foreign investment would be particularly attracted by a reduction in corporation tax.

If the word "harmonisation" were taken out of the motion, perhaps there would be greater political unity on the issue. However, there is consensus that the argument in favour of a reduction in corporation tax is irresistible. Our public finances and the block grant would take a hit, but that is not an insuperable political problem; we could address it sensibly over the next number of years. Indeed, corporation tax does not have to be reduced immediately; it can be done on a tapered basis. Nonetheless, it is a fundamental development that is necessary for us to effect a step change in our economy. That

is driven by the fact that we have a neighbour whose economy has been transformed largely by reducing corporation tax. There is an indisputable argument in that regard that I invite unionist colleagues to embrace.

My time is running out, so I will speak very briefly as an SDLP Member. Vision, imagination and ambition are required to regenerate the economy, North and South. Of course, the economy and economic policy are political issues, but we should not overpoliticise them. They should not become partisan issues because attempting greater co-operation will benefit both parts of this island. If we were to rely on the United Kingdom market alone, we would be failing ourselves. In the South, there is a market of more than four million people on our doorstep that we cannot ignore.

In these difficult times, we must all work to regenerate our economy and the Southern economy. That should be done within the context of the European Union, which provides us with the mechanism for co-operation. Research and development in Ireland is at a low level when compared with our European colleagues. It is important that we raise the level of R&D, which can be done usefully in conjunction with our Southern counterparts.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: That would be of great benefit to both parts of this island. I make a plea to my unionist colleagues: let us put aside partisan feelings and work on a sensible, concrete programme of regeneration, North and South, within the context of the European Union.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this motion. There runs a fear through this Chamber every time a motion is seemingly cross-border or mentions harmonisation. We should move away from that and try to have a vision of the areas on which we can work together. There is not the slightest need for half the difficulties that raise their heads and then sometimes cancel out the whole thrust or possibilities of a motion. Tom Elliott should understand that if you run a business or one island or, indeed, one farm, it is common sense to operate it as one entity and not to have it split into several bits, as we have this island for so long. If even the bits on which we can

agree could be brought together, that would be progress.

In an interview in 'The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland', Taoiseach Brian Cowan stated:

"North-South cooperation is a manifestation of normalising relationships in Ireland."

The Irish Government have never passed up an opportunity to develop policies to further areas in which we might work together, which is why the motion has massive potential. The key to developing pragmatic, all-island policies is to ensure that planners do not plan as though the world ends at their jurisdiction's border. Although I welcome the motion, it needs to encompass much more. The main impediments to a unified approach to attracting foreign direct investment to the whole island are the differences in the regulatory systems, North and South. To enable commercial transactions to take place seamlessly on a North/South basis, we need to bring about complete harmonisation of the regulatory environment.

I also suggest that we expand co-operation into science and technology, innovation and R&D. In the South, more than £4 billion is spent in that area, but we do not spend nearly enough. Such investment would help our third-level institutions and their students to play a greater role in that area. The key to all of that is to pool resources North and South for the benefit of all.

Members on the Benches opposite spoke about the recession in which we find ourselves. Recently, the Conservative Party mentioned the fact that Britain is borrowing something like £300,000 a minute just to pay the interest on what it borrowed to keep things running for the past number of years. Therefore, the economy is in quite a mess over there as well, and it is from there that we expect to get our block grant. We have no say about how much pocket money we get from the block grant. We either get it or we do not, and we spend what we can on what we have to spend it on. That is all that we can do, which is why we must be prepared to think outside the box and think further about our island without feeling threatened. Trying to run the economy better is a threat to no one.

Although the South has macroeconomic difficulties, there is a lot that we can learn from its approach to trade and industry over the past 20 years. Because of regulatory approaches, much was not done right, but maybe that is

a lesson that we can learn from so that our children do not find themselves in the same position in the future.

Spending cuts will come, and we will not be able to do anything about them. Nevertheless, on the subject of people having their say, when our fishermen and farmers negotiate in Brussels, they would not say that it would be better to be on the British end of things.

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

Mr McHugh: People in the South can certainly show us what to do in that area. It makes sense to co-operate.

Mr McDevitt: Mr Butler is in favour of the amendment, Dr McDonnell is in favour, Mr Campbell is against, Mr Kennedy is against, Mr Farry is against, although with his usual caveats — maybe he is on the fence —

Dr Farry: I shall be voting for your amendment.

Mr McDevitt: You are for our amendment, but against the motion. My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will speak through you. Mr Wallace Browne is against the amendment, Mr Gerry Adams is for it, Mr Tom Elliott is against it, Mr Alex Attwood is for it, Mr Alban Maginness is for it, Mr Gerry McHugh is for it, and I shall be voting for it too.

It is as well that the Galleries are empty, because, despite the seriousness of the motion and the fact that it was well drafted, it raises issues that may some day become contentious among Members about whether we will benefit at a regional level.

I would welcome some clarification from the Sinn Féin Member who winds on the motion as to whether its members are talking about absolute fiscal discretion. For example, are they talking about income tax? Despite that, we are not talking about doing any of these things; we are simply talking about looking at how they could be done. I do not know a single businessperson in this region or in these islands who is not interested in looking at all the available options. It sends a poor signal from the Chamber that we have not been able to raise the debate to a level at which we can discuss the options on their merits. It runs against everything that vibrant economies are built on. It runs against the success that both our great islands have been built on.

What set the Republic apart in the past decade was a strategic vision to invest in certain areas of its economy. That vision happened to have been fuelled by a property boom, and that boom has led to a property crash. The bits of the economy that are still there and are vibrant and stable and the bits of FDI that have not left are those that are built on the strategic decision about a decade ago to invest in what was then known as the knowledge-based economy and what we today call innovation. Ironically, that is the same strategic decision that we are trying to take here in Northern Ireland. We have seen the MATRIX report, and we have seen and considered the report from the independent review of economic policy under Professor Richard Barnett. They tell us clearly that, if we are to build a future on our great industrial heritage and on our commitment to and success in light engineering — it is pervasive, not just in cities but in rural communities — we must transform that success into added-value jobs that are sustainable in the long term. We must use that success to attract foreign direct investment. In other words, we have to align what we are already good at with what we teach in universities, what we want to research in them, the type of skills that we wish to promote in further and higher education institutions and the incentives that we have available to attract those jobs.

I do not think that any of us disagree that we lack the key incentive of a lower headline rate of corporation tax. Indeed, that has been widely reflected in the debate. It is sad for me and, I suspect, for those who have bothered to listen in that, instead of having a debate about the bits of this island that could work much better together and the elements of our economies, North and South, that should be closely knit together and about the fact that marketing ourselves abroad when it comes to foreign direct investment as we do in tourism with an equally attractive and compelling fiscal proposition makes common sense, we came in here and rattled off the proverbial in the usual old way. We cannot begin to look at the size of the problems that genuinely confront us as a region until we stop doing that and until we can all see beyond the smallness of our own politics. Mr Attwood mentioned Mr David Gavaghan, the retired chief executive of the Strategic Investment Board. We do not have endless time to come to the very obvious conclusion that, if our region is to survive and

these islands are to be reborn, people have to have good jobs.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McDevitt: For those good jobs to exist and for that investment opportunity to arise, we must all be able to debate the economy on its merits, not its politics.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas Cheann Comhairle. When I looked around the Chamber at the start of the debate, I hoped to see sitting on the Back Benches some of the Ministers for whom the propositions before us would have had some direct relevance. They could have attended and perhaps contributed in that capacity. In fact, the lead spokesperson for the DUP turned out to be Gregory Campbell. I cannot say that I was surprised or particularly disappointed by his comments. He acknowledged, indeed conceded, that the motion was not party political, but it was most definitely political.

Then, of course, he proceeded to give us a party political rant. I do not think that he read the text of the motion, and I question whether some other Members who spoke, particularly those who opposed the motion and the amendment, did either. We are talking about exploring possibilities and potentials. We are so afraid of exploring what would be in the interests of the people who elect us to here, and that includes potential scenarios, even if one does not want to concede that they are any more than that.

2.00 pm

The proposer of the motion itemised a significant body of work conducted by both Governments, trade and business associations, the trade union movement and the North/South Ministerial Council, all of which addressed the benefits of collaboration and the development of an all-island economy. Members should not bury their head in the sand and say that it does not matter. Sinn Féin will not consider the failure of this regional economy, which goes back the best part of 90 years, because that is how long the subvention that is talked about has been in existence. It has been in existence primarily because, at that early stage, the then Stormont Government — the one-party unionist Government — acknowledged that they could not balance the economy. They could not balance the books.

Options are available other than continuing to rely on a subvention for the foreseeable future. Sinn Féin's position is that the best benefit to us all would be a united island and a united Ireland economy, and it will continue to argue that case. Even though Sinn Féin proposed a motion more than two and a half years ago that argued for additional fiscal powers for the Assembly, it is encouraged by the fact that most of the parties are now discussing that option. I take some encouragement from that, despite the rhetoric that we have heard today. People may judge the debate on the body language demonstrated and, perhaps, on the more extreme rhetoric. However, we should acknowledge the fact that most Members who spoke in opposition to the motion talked about the merits of co-operation and acknowledged that there could be mutual benefits.

Several Members referred to the existing bodies. They could also have referred to NAMA and the appointment of representatives here to look after the interests of our regional economy. There was legitimate concern over a possible fire sale by NAMA and over the extent of the property portfolio that NAMA now controls. The Irish Government are effectively the single largest investor in the Northern economy. What did the DUP Minister do when the Oireachtas ratified the NAMA legislation? He immediately went to Dublin to talk to his counterparts, which I publicly welcomed in the Chamber. I could have argued on a partisan basis that that was an example of all-Ireland co-operation. However, the Minister's actions made common sense; it was in our mutual interests for him to go to Dublin. That is the direction from which people should come to the discussion.

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

A sensible and constructive amendment to the motion was tabled. I welcome that approach, because the amendment added value to the motion, as was its intention. Would it not be better if that sense were reflected across the Chamber? We all have responsibilities, and no one here is arguing that the economy in the Twenty-six Counties represents the exemplar model; it clearly does not. Sinn Féin has made many criticisms of the economic structure and the manner in which the Irish Government have applied economic policy in years past. Sinn Féin is not in the business of critiquing British Government economic policy — their economic policy is their business. We must

consider how we can achieve what is the agreed number one priority of rebalancing and growing the economy here. We cannot do that without taking account of the fact that we exist on an island and without the necessary fiscal tools. I defy any Member to argue that we can achieve the objective of growing the private sector of our economy without those necessary tools. If people think that they can achieve that, they are welcome to try, but I would like to hear their rationale and argument. That is why I found Stephen Farry's comment that the motion went too far particularly interesting. That means that exploring the potential is a step too far for the Alliance Party. Perhaps Members from that party will reflect on those comments, because —

Mr Elliott: Earlier, a Member spoke about the prospect of an all-island regulatory system. Does the Member accept that the failure of the regulator in the Irish Republic to deal with the recent Quinn Insurance dilemma in a practical and workable way had a detrimental effect on the employees and businesses in the South of Ireland and in Northern Ireland?

Mr McLaughlin: The Member has made a fair point, and he should perhaps apply that logic to his earlier comments.

When motions are tabled from this side of the House with the aim of developing and enhancing the power of the Assembly to regulate its affairs, they are often regarded as problematic. Today, we again heard Members defending UK economic policy and comparing it with the Irish Government's approach. That is not what the debate is about, and that mistake is constantly made. We should be talking about what we can do to develop our economy, taking account of the social, economic and political realities around us.

With direct reference to Mr Elliott's intervention, I quote the joint Government study on all-Ireland co-operation:

"There are many important steps which can be taken. For example, on regulatory issues, both Governments are continuing to work together to address the differences in the regulatory environment in order to develop a truly all island economy."

That is a comment from the British and Irish Governments. Members should read those reports, because they are the road map that point to the direction that we should take.

The issue of whether there will be an all-island political system is a different debate, for which Sinn Féin is ready at any time. However, let us be sensible about how we can represent the economic interests of this region. We cannot do it alone, by burying our heads in the sand or on the basis of the powers that Westminster gives us at present. We require additional powers and the opportunity to co-operate and to explore all the potential of that co-operation. That is what the motion and its helpful amendment argue for.

I do not expect Members to change their mind today or, given the upcoming election, in the next year. However, I ask the unionist parties and the quasi-unionist Alliance Party to consider whether this is a sensible way forward for the Assembly. The current approach condemns us to presiding over whatever size of an economic cake Westminster decides to give us. No matter how many times the British Government come back to take a big chunk out of that cake, we will try our best to divide it up among the Departments. However, we will also continue to preside over Budget deficits, which mean that we cannot deliver the full range of services to which the people whom we represent are entitled. I urge the Assembly to support the motion as amended. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 42; Noes 46.

AYES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Dr Deeny, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Leonard, Ms Lo, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, DrxMcDonnell, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr McHugh, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Mr Neeson, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Attwood and Mr McDevitt.

NOES

Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan,

Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McGimpsey, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Kennedy and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negated.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes it ease until that time. The Question on the motion will be put after the question for urgent oral answer.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Migration: Public Services

2. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department intends to spend the £1 million, from the UK migration impacts fund, to address specifically pressures on public services relating to the transitional impacts of legal migration. (AQO 1228/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): The Communities Secretary, Hazel Blears, and the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, announced details of the migration impacts fund on 19 March 2009. As a consequence of that decision, the Northern Ireland Executive received £978,000 additional current funding for 2009-2010 through the Barnett formula. However, as the Member will know, allocations received through the Barnett formula are unhypothecated; that is, we make the decision as to how they are spent. Just because something comes under a certain budget head at Westminster does not mean that we put it under the same budget head here. The additional funding that arose was considered by the Executive and by the Assembly in the 2009 June monitoring round.

Ms Lo: As that money is specifically to ease pressures on public services in relation to migrant workers, should it not be ring-fenced to particularly target areas such as health, education, employment and learning and, to a degree, the voluntary sector, which has carried out front-line services for migrant communities?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member raises an interesting point. However, if we simply took it for granted that money allocated to us under the Barnett formula was ring-fenced for the purpose decided at Westminster, there would not need to be a devolved Assembly here in Northern Ireland. We would simply take it that the money had been

allocated to us for a certain purpose, and we would use it for that purpose.

The whole point of having the Assembly is that we decide what the spending priorities for Northern Ireland ought to be. Of course, as this matter was considered in the June monitoring round, there were opportunities for Departments and Ministers to bid for the money if they believed that there were particular needs concerning the issues the Member mentioned. Indeed, Committees — I am not sure which Committee the Member is on — could have raised the matter when they were discussing the monitoring round bids. All I can say is that no bids were made in the June 2009 monitoring round for the type of issue that the Member has suggested, nor was there a demand for that when the monitoring round was debated here in the Assembly.

Mr Leonard: Given what the Minister said about the workings of the Assembly and the reason we are here, has he had any specific discussions with Executive colleagues about creating an emergency fund for those who, due to immigration status, cannot access public funding for services that they need?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is a mechanism in place already. Monitoring rounds take place four times a year in the Assembly, when Departments declare reduced requirements. Funding from those reduced requirements is put into a central pot, and Ministers can bid for allocations from that central pot. That is the mechanism should an emergency arise during the year. Of course, for planned expenditure, it is up to Ministers, Departments and Committees to make applications or raise issues before the final Budget for the year is set. As I know to my expense — I spent long hours here during the Budget debates in February and March, and I thought I was living in this place — there is ample opportunity at that stage for Members to raise issues on the Floor of the House if they feel that the Budget does not reflect those pressures.

Mr McDevitt: What specific approaches and bids has the Minister received from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which has responsibility for dealing with actual crises that may have arisen in the past year or that could arise in the future?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In 2009-2010, when the migration fund was made available to us, no bids were received from any Departments. I will point out to the Member and the Assembly that, although the money was made available in 2009, to date there has been no indication that any money will be made available this year. That comes back to the point made by another Member for South Belfast Ms Lo. We could have ring-fenced the money from Westminster. However, that funding was a one-off event; year-on-year funding for that purpose will not be provided. Therefore, a programme might have been started that could not have been continued.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that information. Will he tell the House whether any Northern Ireland Department has highlighted funding pressures in relation to the migration fund?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: No Department has bid for money to deal with the pressures that migrants might place on it. However, I understand the Member for South Belfast's point. Very often, there is a big influx of pupils at schools in certain areas where migrants congregate. There was an influx of nurses who came to work at Whiteabbey Hospital and their families to my constituency. One of the local primary schools then found that a large number of the children spoke English as their second language, and that created certain pressures. The Department of Education is responsible for making provision for those children. In fact, the common funding formula enables that to happen. However, if Departments consistently identify such pressures, they have an opportunity, through the monitoring rounds or the budgetary process, to make that known and to make bids. Of course, Members of the Assembly also have an opportunity to do that. They can raise the issue with the Minister, the Committee concerned or at debates in the House to try to raise awareness and to persuade Departments to make bids where such needs are identified.

Chancellor of the Exchequer

3. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he intends to meet the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. (AQO 1229/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The First Minister and deputy First Minister have spoken to the First Lord of the Treasury by phone

and are expecting him to visit Northern Ireland very soon. After that, I will be seeking an early meeting with the rest of the new Treasury ministerial team. I need to raise a number of important issues with the incoming Treasury ministerial team, not least the approach to and the timing of the next comprehensive spending review.

Mr Easton: Does the Minister plan to look at ways of simplifying financial issues and creating better transparency of the Estimates and the Budget with the Treasury? Does he agree that that would be in the interests of Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Treasury alignment project in England was the result of concerns that MPs raised about the transparency of the Budget and the ability to prove accountability. However, as the Member will know, the way in which we conduct our budgetary process and present our accounts are matters for the Assembly. Therefore, I will not be raising them with Treasury officials or Ministers. However, the Member raises an important point. During debates in the House on the Budget, Members raised, time and again, issues about the complexity and transparency of the information available, the elongated process and whether the information was in a form that was useful to Members. I also heard criticism of Ministers who did not present information to their Committee during the Budget process. I am interested to know Members' views on how we might improve transparency, presentation and the way in which we deal with the budgetary process. However, I will not be taking those matters up with Treasury officials or Ministers.

Dr Farry: I hope that the Finance Minister and the Executive will continue to make the case that Northern Ireland should be exempt, as far as possible, from cuts. However, does the Minister accept that, in making that argument, we need to show the Treasury that we are prepared to put our house in order financially on issues such as water charges? How does the Minister plan to make that case to the Treasury?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member makes a very important point. I have said that we will simply not succeed if we hold out our hand and tell the Treasury that, at this particular time in our economic history, we in Northern Ireland want to keep all our money or, indeed, want more. We have to make a comprehensive case.

The Member is concerned about the way that we have evaded and avoided the issue of water charges. However, this Assembly has, to a certain extent, led the way on public sector pay, for example. We are the only region in the United Kingdom that has stopped bonuses to senior civil servants. In setting the context for a tighter pay round, we introduced spend to save measures that encourage Departments to look forward, and we set aside money in the Budget so that Departments could make substantial savings in the future, the criteria for which were designed to ensure that Ministers and Departments did plan ahead to make those savings. I am sure that the issue of water charges will be raised when I meet the Treasury Minister. He knows it is my view that, if we are going to dip into people's pockets, we have to ensure that the House has taken the necessary action to make all available savings and has collectively addressed the cost of administration and some of the consequences that that may have for each of us. That must be done if we are to persuade people that we are serious about efficient public spending.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In answer to Mr Farry's question, the Finance Minister said that this House will have to take all measures possible before it dips its hands into the taxpayers' pockets. Therefore, does he agree that the Exchequer will find it strange that he, as Finance Minister, was not present for the debate on how the Assembly and Executive deal with the Dublin Government and bring forward policies that will benefit both economies on this island? Surely, the Exchequer would say that he should be working with his nearest partner to reduce waste.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not want to give the Member a lesson in how the business of this House is conducted. However, he knows that the Business Committee decides whether a debate requires a ministerial response, and, if it does, the relevant Minister is assigned to be in the House to answer the debate. I can only assume that his colleagues on the Business Committee were happy that that debate did not require a ministerial response.

My record shows that I do not run away from the fact that we live on an island where there are certain cross-border economic relationships that we cannot ignore. That is unlike the Member's party, which wants to ignore that most important of relationships between this part of the United

Kingdom and the rest of the United Kingdom, with which we do the vast majority of our trade, from which we get the vast majority of our investment and from which we get an £8 billion subsidy every year. Whether in my previous role as Environment Minister or in my current role as Finance Minister, my record is not one of ignoring the existence of the Republic or of not engaging with its Ministers. We have to get this into perspective.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Finance Minister tell the House what preparatory work he has done and submitted to the Treasury to protect the block grant for Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We are working in the dark at the moment. We have not had a comprehensive spending review. We do not know when that will start, over what period it will last or what period it will look at. Before the election, we made the case to the previous Government that we needed certainty. We have already put down a marker that it would be difficult to sustain very deep cuts to a Budget in the middle of a financial year in which, following a huge debate, we have already reallocated money and Departments already have their spending programmes in place. We have signalled those warnings to the Treasury. We have indicated that we need some certainty and, at the very least, a three-year vision so that Departments can plan. In all of this, we can make our views available to the Treasury, as other Administrations have done. At the end of the day, Westminster Ministers will make the decision.

2.45 pm

Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation

4. **Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the independence of the NI Authority for Utility Regulation and the need for politicians and departmental officials to avoid any actions that might undermine the authority's independence. (AQO 1230/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The statutory basis of the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation as a non-ministerial Department is central to the independence of the organisation and to its role of protecting consumers' interests. With that in mind, the Northern Ireland Assembly should have a

particular interest in ensuring that Northern Ireland has a strong, effective and independent Utility Regulator to oversee the operations and pricing regimes of the local utility companies. That is particularly important in the context of maintaining consumer confidence in the developing and more diverse arrangements for the delivery of utilities in Northern Ireland. Given the recent fluctuations in utility costs for local customers, the role of the Utility Regulator has added importance.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he give an assessment of the need for and benefits of independence of regulation, particularly when the utility is publicly owned?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will address the second part of the Member's question: it does not really matter whether the utility is publicly owned, mutualised or privately owned. In a situation in which the normal market and competition within the market do not operate, of course regulation is needed. That is especially the case when it comes to utilities, because the utilities involved, whether they be gas, water or electricity, are of such importance to individuals and households. First, regulation is important because of the nature of the products that the Utility Regulator looks after. Secondly, it is important because of price fluctuations, which we have seen for some of the products and services that I mentioned. Thirdly, it is important that independence be maintained, because consumers will always be suspicious if the party that makes the judgements is seen to have an interest in one side or the other.

Of course, if a Minister were regulating the utilities, consumers would tell him or her to bear in mind that the gas or water company invests in Northern Ireland and that some of the utilities come under the remit of his or her Department. Therefore, from the point of view of consumer confidence, given the services that the regulator deals with, it is important that the office is seen not to be on the side of one group or another.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Minister support the apparent need for a firm regulatory framework, specified over a number of years and including targets and measureable outcomes, for Northern Ireland Water? The introduction of such a framework would mean that not only the water company but the public and the Assembly could all have an agreed set of objectives.

Everybody would be in the clear, and there would be no dark corners or misunderstandings.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I know why the Member has identified water. It is important that we have a regulator, because, as Dr Farry said in his supplementary question, we may be looking at the cost of water being put directly on consumers at some stage. If that happens, we must ensure that we have in place an organisation that does not squander the money collected. The organisation must also have an investment programme that is designed to reduce the cost of water.

A good, clean water supply and a proper sewage disposal system are important for public health, so it is important that Northern Ireland Water be properly regulated and that we have a proper plan for it. Proper regulation is also important given the effects that a chaotic water market could have, especially when it comes to sewage disposal, on infraction fines from the European Union, if we miss targets for reducing pollution etc. Given that we are to invest about £3,000 million in the sewerage and water system over the next 10 years, we also want to ensure that that money is spent wisely and to the best effect.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that fuel prices here are much steeper than anywhere else in Europe, is the Minister content that his Department and DETI are doing enough to make sure that the pricing mechanisms that companies employ are fair and transparent and that the consumer gets the best value for money?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not too sure whether the Member is referring to fuel prices generally or to fuel oil, which has not been mentioned so far. I emphasise again, however, that it is not the role of my Department, DETI or of any other Department to regulate the price of fuel in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether it is electricity, gas or oil. Indeed, if that were the case, I suspect that people would not be all that happy, because they could argue that I, as a Minister, had a vested interest in protecting a public utility. Indeed, if a private utility were involved, it could be argued that I was perhaps being influenced by that utility's investment proposals. That is why we have an independent regulator.

Fuel oil is not regulated. The regulator indicated that, if the Assembly decided that it wished to have fuel oil regulated, he would be happy for

that to be in his remit. However, given that the market for fuel oil is mature and fairly competitive, we are probably talking about regulation in energy efficiency, service standards and protecting the vulnerable, rather than about prices, because the market will tend to regulate prices when there is a large number of suppliers.

Civil Service: Back Pay

5. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the current status of the Civil Service back pay.
(AQO 1231/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The vast majority of eligible Northern Ireland Civil Service staff have moved on to their new pay scales and have received the associated pay arrears. The next stage of the process is to advise staff of their individual settlement amounts. That will be communicated to staff shortly. In parallel, NIPSA is to contact its members who have registered equal pay claims at industrial tribunals to consult them about the legal process involved in withdrawing those claims. In addition, the Department will require staff in the affected grades who have not registered equal pay claims to sign an agreement to accept the proposed terms of the settlement.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Why are the staff who left before 1 August 2008 excluded?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Staff who left before 1 August 2008 are excluded because equal pay legislation makes it clear that former employees have six months in which to lodge an equal pay claim with the industrial tribunal. The proposal is to settle all equal pay claims that NIPSA lodged. On that basis, those who left six months before the claims were lodged were excluded. That is the legal position. We would not have the authorisation to spend money outside what the law requires us to do. Indeed, I would imagine that the Public Accounts Committee may ask questions if we went beyond the legal remit that the legislation has given us. The legislation is quite clear, which is why staff who had left before that date and had not lodged claims were not included.

Mr McLaughlin: Thank you very much, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for those updated responses. Is the Minister

aware that a growing lobby disputes the outcome of the settlement, given the individual circumstances of some people? I am referring to recently retired civil servants and to civil servants who were on secondment for part of the period that the settlement covers. In those circumstances, will he reconsider the appointment of an independent adjudication panel to address those issues and formalise outcomes?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although the Member's invitation to reopen the whole question may seem enticing, especially to those of us who have been lobbied by various groups, we must first bear it in mind that the negotiations and their terms of reference were entered into on clear terms with NIPSA — the representatives of the workforce — and the Department. People knew what the terms were. Secondly, as I said earlier, we have a statutory framework within which we must operate. Thirdly, it is not in my power to enter into agreements for people who are not covered by my Department.

It is quite clear that the people in my Department who were covered were people who worked for the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Once we open Pandora's box to include those who have retired, how far back do we go? Do we include those who have been retired for one year, 10 years or 20 years? The Assembly has debated how we should pay for the pay claim, which has been costly and may still cost jobs in Northern Ireland. The Assembly has already seen how difficult it is to deal with the total cost. For all the reasons that I have given, although it may be an attractive proposition, I must resist inviting an independent adjudicator to look at the matter.

Mr O'Loan: I welcome other Members' support for retired staff. That support was not so evident when I raised the issue in the Committee for Finance and Personnel. I want to ask the Minister about staff employed by the PSNI and other NDPBs who are equivalent to those in the Civil Service who received the back pay settlement and who, in many cases, were seconded from the Civil Service. Is there provision in the budgets of those organisations to make a back pay settlement, not merely to pay the new scales, which in at least one case, I believe, have already been agreed? Does the Minister support the position that those people ought to have the same full settlement as

mainstream members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: First, it would be totally inappropriate of me to answer for the circumstances in other Ministers' Departments. I know that discussions with the Minister of Justice are ongoing about those who worked for the Northern Ireland Office and the PSNI. He will have to ascertain whether an equivalence exists and, if so, what the settlement should be. If that is agreed, the way in which it will be financed will require the submission of a business case. The same applies to the NDPBs: each organisation will have to examine its legal status and the terms of its particular memorandums of understanding to determine whether there is a requirement.

I suspect that the answer to the first part of the Member's question is that, since there was not a full appreciation of the nature, cost and extent of the pay claim, there will not be money in those organisations' budgets. At that point, Departments and bodies will have to make a business case for the money or decide how to use or reallocate existing resources to pay for any legitimate claim that is lodged.

EU Funding

6. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what improvements have been made by Departments in the administration of EU funding over the past three years. (AQO 1232/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Under the current round of EU funding, Northern Ireland has four structural funds: competitiveness, employment, Peace III and INTERREG IVa. The relevant programme authorities are DETI, DEL and the Special EU Programmes Body. DFP works closely with all three to identify efficiencies and promote a culture of continuous improvement. My Department has also overseen the production of a comprehensive management control system for the conduct of EU funding in Northern Ireland. The European Commission subsequently assessed and approved the controls.

I hope that Mr O'Dowd is listening so that he knows that I am not insular and that I do not ignore the fact that we have a land boundary with the Irish Republic. Quite clearly, he is not listening. At my last meeting with Mr Lenihan, we identified savings of £4.5 million in

administration so that more money would be available for the delivery of programmes.

3.00 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Multiple Sclerosis

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what further services or support his Department intends to offer people with multiple sclerosis and their families. (AQO 1241/10)

11. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether and when people with multiple sclerosis will have access to the drugs cladribine and fingolimod, given that we have the second-highest prevalence of multiple sclerosis in the world. (AQO 1251/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 11 together. People diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) have access to a wide range of health and social care services, including physiotherapy; occupational therapy; community nursing; speech and language therapy; dietetics; social work and social care; domiciliary care; day care; and daytime opportunities in respite, including specialist respite care. Their carers are also offered a carers' assessment to determine individual needs. MS patients may also be seen in consultant hospital services.

My Department is exploring ways to provide better support, education and training to clinicians, patients, families and carers of people with neurological conditions, including those with MS. A disability strategy, which will include neuro-disability, is being developed. That will complement existing strategies and partnerships to improve the health and well-being of all people with a disability in Northern Ireland.

The drugs cladribine and fingolimod are not yet licensed for use in the UK. I would not expect new drugs to be available on the Health Service until they have been licensed and their safety and clinical cost-effectiveness have been assessed. People in Northern Ireland currently

have access to a number of specialist drugs for multiple sclerosis, such as beta interferon.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response. He may be aware that, recently, the MS Society held a representative gathering in the Long Gallery. One of its biggest problems is the lack of provision for neuro-physiotherapy. Will the Minister indicate when improved and increased physiotherapy for MS patients will be available throughout Northern Ireland? I acknowledge that he referred to that issue.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are currently 89 specialist physiotherapists with neurological disability skills in Northern Ireland, and they are spread across all the trusts. There is a shortage of physiotherapists wishing to specialise in neuro-physiotherapy. We have a regional network for neuro-practitioners, and I am also developing an allied health professionals (AHP) strategy. That will focus on services that AHPs need to provide and services that we do not provide enough of.

I introduced targets two years ago, and waiting times for physiotherapy have been transformed. No one waits longer than 13 weeks between a first referral and first treatment, and I intend to bring that time down. In June 2008, 1,650 people waited for over 13 weeks, so we have made real strides and improvements. However, the physiotherapy service requires investment.

Mr Ross: The Minister will be aware of a disproportionately high number of MS sufferers in my constituency of East Antrim. Will he confirm whether neuro-physiotherapists are working exclusively with those who are suffering from strokes in the Northern Trust area? That is the perception among those suffering from MS.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Member will not be surprised to hear that I am unable to confirm such an assertion. There are 22 physiotherapists with neurological disability skills in the Northern Trust. There are 174 physiotherapists in the Northern Trust as a whole, many of whom have the capacity to support both stroke and MS sufferers. I will inquire and write to the Member. There are an estimated 3,500 MS sufferers in Northern Ireland, and it is one of the conditions that I would like to do more to support. I hope that the strategy will help to better inform me on how to focus our services.

Mr McClarty: I welcome the Minister's recent announcement of a £50,000 investment to enable the establishment of an MS network. Does the Minister agree that even more needs to be done to help MS sufferers but cutting the health budget will make it even more difficult to help MS sufferers and many other worthy causes?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: What Mr McClarty says is absolutely and undoubtedly true. The people who voted to cut the budget need to reflect on the patients who are suffering as a result of the cuts. I have increased investment in disease-modifying therapies. Physiotherapy is an important part, but disease-modifying therapies through drugs are also a very important part of the treatment.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware of or has he been apprised of the information that is available to the Department on the use of low-dose naltrexone in the treatment of MS and other illnesses?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I will have to write to Mr McGlone, as I am not aware of that issue offhand.

Brand-named Drugs

2. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average cost of brand-named prescribed drugs compared to generic equivalents and what percentage of drugs dispensed are brand-named.
(AQO 1242/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department's policy position is that, in all appropriate circumstances, medicine should be prescribed generically rather than by brand name. My aim is to achieve a generic dispensing rate of 64% by March 2011. That is comparable to the current UK rate and will equate to a 50% increase in generic prescribing in Northern Ireland since 2007. As a result, I am on target to create overall efficiency savings from the prescribing budget of some £88 million.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. What strategies is he putting in place to ensure that generic drugs are used more frequently than brand-named drugs?

The Minister of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety: Our Go Generic policy is achieving results, and we have made gains as far as the use of generic drugs is concerned. When I came into the job only a few years ago, the generic dispensing rate was 43%, and it is now up at 59%. I anticipate that the target of 64% will be achieved in 2010-11, which compares favourably with England. We were far behind England three years ago, but we are now within touching distance. The generic dispensing rate in England sits at 68%, and I anticipate that we will reach 64% next year. Prescribing is a very much a matter for doctors and GPs, but the Go Generic policy is that generic drugs will be prescribed when appropriate.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the initiative from the Minister and the Department. It is the way forward, but who monitors it? I am well aware of GPs prescribing brand-named drugs and pharmacists dispensing generic drugs. How do we follow up on any shortfall to ensure that the money returns?

The Minister of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety: The Business Services Organisation has an important role to play in monitoring and ensuring that pharmacists give patients the drugs that the doctor prescribed on the script. It would be a very serious matter if chemists and pharmacists were not following that process.

We plan to invest in and modernise the entire prescribing and follow-up process through electronic prescribing. We are moving towards a new drug tariff that will look not simply at the price of drugs but at the factory door price. We are also working on the development of a formulary for Northern Ireland. That is a very important piece of work. Some 8,000 items will be on it, so that work will not be completed within one year. Those are the steps that I am taking, together with the establishment of a pharmacy contract, which is in development. A number of key elements must come together to allow us to get full value for money from the drugs budget.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister accept in respect of the negotiations on the new pharmacy contract that there is a need to explore the possibility of giving pharmacists a much more active and direct role in the prescription of drugs to ensure

that some medics do not abuse their authority by opting out of the prescribing of generic drugs?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

Any suggestion that GPs opt out of prescribing generics would be a leading remark about our GPs, whom I rely on as the gatekeepers of the entire system. Anyone who makes remarks like that must be able to substantiate them.

Pharmacists operate our minor ailments policy, whereby they may prescribe a number of treatments and medicines without the patient having to go to a GP. Ultimately, however, the GPs manage that process, and the new commissioning system that I have put in place is led by professionals on the ground. GPs are the gatekeepers of the entire system, not just for acute, older people's or children's services but for our drugs policy.

DHSSPS: Joint Feasibility Study

3. **Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he plans to publish the joint feasibility study commissioned by his Department and the Republic of Ireland's Department of Health and Children, which has been with his Department since February 2009. (AQO 1243/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

I have consistently said that I support working more closely with the Department of Health and Children if that can deliver tangible benefits to the population. On 29 March, I wrote to Minister Harney to set out my position on that piece of work. I have considered the study, and I am not persuaded that the report should progress further at this time. We will, however, continue to work with the health authorities in the Republic on practical and deliverable projects that have a clearly defined benefit for the population, such as the current radiotherapy project at Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Mr P J Bradley: The Minister said that he is not prepared to publish the report at this time. Will he give a precise date for publication?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

It is my intention to publish the study, but it is not, strictly speaking, my property alone. It was a joint project that was set up by Paul Goggins, the then Minister with responsibility for health, and Ms Harney. It is half our report, half Ms Harney's. I wrote to her

on 29 March to set out my position. I await her response, and then we will consider how to move forward. Her agreement is necessary to allow me to publish the study. Those are the mechanics of the process. I have no problem with publishing the report, but I must go through the required steps.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister agree that, because his is the only Department that has met its review of public administration commitments and because he is focused on reducing bureaucracy, now is not the time to set up something new that would further increase that bureaucracy?

3.15 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Members will, in due course, get an opportunity to read the report and make their own determination. However, the report that I read does not explain costs or benefits; it asks for further research, consideration, investigation and so on. I always seek opportunities for co-operation, but it must be co-operation that delivers practical results and benefits for the population of Northern Ireland. Although I will have further discussions with my counterpart from Dublin, as far as I can see, such opportunities are not contained in the report.

Mr McCallister is right: my Department is the only one that has delivered all its RPA requirements. The Budget has gone a long way towards creating efficiencies to allow us to deliver health and social care services in Northern Ireland. My Department's budget is smaller than is required to run the Health Service in Northern Ireland, and I do not have money left over for extras unless I am certain that they will deliver benefits.

Mr O'Dowd: I find it interesting that the Ulster Unionist Party is harping on about RPA, given that it blocked the RPA in education. If my party had taken the same attitude towards health, there would be no RPA in health either. How and ever, from listening to the Minister's responses on the subject, I suspect that the reasons for non-publication are political rather than clinical. The Department of Health is in dire need of financial assistance in using its scant resources. Surely, therefore, the duplication of services along the border is a drain on Mr McGimpsey's resources and on those of Minister Harney. The sooner the report is published and implemented, the better.

The Minister of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety: The Member will have an opportunity to read the report in due course. My problem is that I do not see anything in the report to implement. It is long on discussion and on the need for further discussion, but I am looking for practical steps.

As far as the cross-border issue is concerned, the Member accuses me of being politically rather than clinically motivated. Before doing so, he should take account of my work on paediatric and congenital cardiac services, suicide prevention, GP out-of-hours provision, child protection and the satellite radiotherapy facility at Altnagelvin Area Hospital, to name but a few. If I were as political as he claims, none of that work would be going forward. Also on the subject of co-operation along the border, I presume that Mr O'Dowd wants me to shut Daisy Hill Hospital and let all hospital patients go to Louth County Hospital.

Mental Health and Learning Disabilities

4. Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he plans to bring forward a single Bill on mental health and learning disabilities. (AQO 1244/10)

Mr D Bradley: Ceist uimhir a ceathair, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: I presume that Dominic Bradley means question No 4.

On 10 September — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The standard procedure is that the Member repeats what he said in English.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: On 10 September 2009, I announced that my Department would take the lead in preparing a single Bill which will encompass mental capacity and mental health provisions, to be introduced in the next Assembly mandate in 2011. Subject to Executive approval, the wide-ranging Bill will be enacted in 2013, and it will provide additional protections for those who lack the capacity to make decisions for themselves about their health, welfare and finances.

Mr D Bradley: Question No 4, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire fosta as an fhreagra a thug sé. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí de an gcreideann sé gur chóir go mbeadh an Bille seo bunaithe ar chearta.

I thank the Minister for his response. In his view, should the Bill be rights-based?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Without getting into the legal terminology into which the Member may wish to draw me, there are important benefits in the Bill as far as mental capacity and mental health provisions are concerned. The Bill's purpose is to put in place substitute decision-making arrangements for those who are unable to make their own decisions. However, that process must include strong protections for the individuals concerned. It will have a wide application and cover decisions about a person's medical treatment, welfare and financial affairs. As far as possible, it will also encourage participation in the decision-making process to ensure that the views of the patient and others are taken into account. It is very much about ensuring that decisions are made in the best interests of the individual concerned.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister state whether epilepsy will be covered specifically in any such Bill?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This issue very much follows on from the strategy that came from the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, which includes dementia, autism and acquired brain and stroke injury. Epilepsy would not be covered by a Bill that encompassed mental capacity and mental health provisions. However, that is not to say that patients who suffer from epilepsy will not be covered; they will be covered, but perhaps because of another condition that they have, such as a learning disability.

Dr Farry: I welcome the Minister's commitment to a single Bill. I believe that Northern Ireland has the opportunity to be a world leader in the area. What actions can his Department take in advance of the next Assembly's consideration of a Bill, particularly on the Bamford action plan and any equality impact assessment of the legislation?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The equality impact assessment will be consulted on in August of this year. I plan

to have the policy cleared by the Executive in the autumn as we move to drafting the single Bill. I have cross-departmental support for implementing the Bamford review, and I am moving forward with that. All the Ministers who are involved are, without exception, very positive about the Bamford agenda.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Members who were due to ask questions 5 and 6 are not in their place.

Tyrone County Hospital

7. **Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he can confirm that funding will be made available to proceed with the newbuild for Tyrone County Hospital. (AQO 1247/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I assume that the Member is referring to the Omagh local hospital, which is to be built at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital site. I reaffirm my continued commitment to the Omagh local hospital. However, given the current financial climate and the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the next CSR process, I must look at all my priorities and be certain of the availability of funding to build and operate the facility before the Omagh project can progress. That is the position for all infrastructure projects in my planned programme.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. However, I must say that his answer was not very encouraging. Will the Minister confirm that that local enhanced hospital, as it started out, was deemed to be a priority and that he wanted to proceed with it as soon as everyone agreed that it should go ahead? It is still unclear why there is a delay.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I would have thought that the reason is obvious. I reaffirm my continued support for the Omagh local hospital and the changes that we made to it, which mirror the Developing Better Services programme. The local hospital has seen an increase in activity and it is busy, so I can easily justify the expenditure and investment there.

The procurement process underwent a review, and I explained to the House that I was given a financial profile that allowed only for PFI. When that was no longer value for money, I had to look at other options. I must also look at reviewing

the financial profile of the Department's capital. So far, however, I have done so without success. In addition, I have to do a business case, but I have to be certain of the financial settlement. I remind Mrs McGill that her party voted to take £700 million of efficiencies from the Health Department's budget. I also remind her that, when the House was deciding whether the Health Department should be exempt from financial cuts, Mrs McGill's party voted for cuts to the health budget. A few weeks ago, a Budget came forward that took £115 million from the health budget. Again, Mrs McGill's party voted for that. I find it somewhat ironic to hear the Member telling me that Omagh is a priority for her and that she cannot understand the problem, because not once or twice but three times she voted to take money away from health. I did not notice that point in any Sinn Féin manifesto.

Dr Deeny: I listened to the Minister's statement on finance. Now that the people of Tyrone are losing a third acute hospital, surely he realises how those people feel about him and his Department. Surely he must commit to the hospital on clinical grounds and on safety and health grounds. In Omagh, we are delighted with the cardiac unit and the X-ray services. Will the Minister give those people a commitment? On clinical grounds, the people of Tyrone need this hospital in Omagh, including continued cardiac and acute psychiatric services.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: For the third time, I repeat that I remain committed to the project. I also remind Dr Deeny that there is a financial bill to it all. The Omagh hospital will cost a considerable sum of money, but, when I put it to the Committee that we were looking at £190 million, Mr Deeny told me that he would not give me 190p for it. It is a pity that, at the time, Dr Deeny and others were not prepared to get behind my proposals. If they had, maybe now I would be a bit further on with delivering that vital investment for the people of Omagh and the surrounding area.

Mrs M Bradley: Is it possible to give a timeline for the completion of the new Tyrone County Hospital?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is difficult to be absolutely certain about a timeline for completing the hospital. Everything depends on ensuring that

we have the money. As part of the business case, I have to ascertain that the money will be there, not least the money to build it but also the revenue to run it. I remain committed to this hospital, because there is a clear need for a local hospital in Omagh. I have invested quite a bit of time, effort and, as Dr Deeny pointed out, political capital in pursuing the project, and I will continue to do so.

Carrickfergus Primary Care Centre

8. Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the business case has been finalised for the level 2 primary care centre in Carrickfergus. (AQO 1248/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has been asked to develop a business case for a health and care centre in Carrickfergus. Determining the availability of funding to support the project is a key element of that process. Until a business case has been submitted and assessed by my officials, I cannot give a commitment to this or any other project in the planning stage. In addition, given the financial climate and the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the next CSR, I must look at all projects and be certain of funding availability before any of them can progress.

Mr Hilditch: On the back of recent news about further cuts and the reduction in facilities at Whiteabbey Hospital and given the potential benefits for the community, would it be reasonable for the Minister to think about prioritising the level 2 healthcare centre for Carrickfergus?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All those factors will be taken into account. As I am sure the Member is aware, the point of situating a health and care centre in Carrickfergus is to co-locate the community teams in a one-stop shop, integrating primary and community care needs. Bringing the Carrickfergus project onto the list was one project, among others, about which I felt strongly. However, capital funding remains an obstacle. Until I have absolute certainty, I would be misleading the House by saying anything other than that it remains in question.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister accept that a primary health and care centre for Carrickfergus and, indeed, Larne would reduce some of the

pressure on Antrim Area Hospital and that there is a degree of urgency about pursuing it?

If capital funding is not available, is the Minister considering alternative funding arrangements, such as PPPs, that might enable such a facility to be brought forward?

The Minister of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety: All those issues will be considered when drafting the business case. We are tied into value for money, which is an overriding Treasury principle, but I do not rule out any form of funding in order to get the projects that we clearly need, not only in Omagh but in Carrickfergus and Larne.

3.30 pm

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

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received noticed of a question for urgent oral answer under Standing Order 20 to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I advise the House that, when dealing with questions for urgent oral answer, generally only the Member who tabled the question and the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of the relevant Committee are called to speak. However, given the issue, the Speaker has agreed that party representatives with a constituency interest will be given an opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Dodds asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the reasons for the bringing forward of closure of services at Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster hospitals; and if he will intervene to give time for a review of the decision to be undertaken.

The Minister of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): Patient safety is of the utmost priority in the delivery of health and social care services, and I will not compromise on that position. In 2002, the Developing Better Services programme established that Whiteabbey Hospital and Mid-Ulster Hospital would be developed as local hospitals without acute services. The transition towards their new role as local hospitals has been confirmed in a number of announcements. Changes to the remaining acute services at Mid-Ulster Hospital and Whiteabbey Hospital had been scheduled to take place in the coming months. However, the trust has made me aware of pressing safety issues and difficulties in sustaining the current level of acute services, which have meant that immediate changes are required to the current A&E services on both sites and to inpatient medical services at Whiteabbey Hospital. The advice of senior clinicians is clear: this change is necessary within the time frame that the trust has set.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the Health and Social Care Board have assured me that the trusts affected, including the Ambulance Service Trust, will be in a state of readiness to implement the change as planned. In addition, the trust will ensure that the minor injuries services provided on both sites from next Monday will be supported by medical cover for two months so as to provide a safe transition to the new model of service.

Mr Dodds: The question that I tabled refers to Whiteabbey Hospital and Mid-Ulster Hospital, but my remarks will mainly be about Whiteabbey Hospital. I am sure that Members from Mid Ulster will want to comment on their own constituency interest.

I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. However, he will be aware of the great distress and anger that has been voiced in my constituency and further afield at the suddenness of the decision to bring forward the closure of services. It has had a major impact on patients, prospective patients and staff. When I visited the hospital on Friday, I spoke to consultants, doctors, staff and auxiliary staff, all of whom were extremely perturbed by what they see as a breach of the agreement, which was that the A&E and cardiology services would be moved to Antrim Area Hospital in 2011.

When I met Colm Donaghy, the trust's chief executive, on Friday, he said that it was not a question of money; therefore, it must be a question of management, because the situation, as outlined by the Minister, did not happen overnight. What makes it an emergency now, when it was not an emergency previously? I ask the Minister, instead of approving the proposal from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, to take time to review it and to allow the decision to go ahead as previously for a transition next year. Why have cardiology services been included in the transfer of services from Whiteabbey Hospital? Will the Minister address the issue raised by staff and patients about the ability of Antrim Area Hospital to cope?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mr Dodds made a number of points, and I will try to address them as best I can. With regard to the timescale, the matter was consulted on and agreed on as the way forward in 2002, so there has been a long run-in period. When I came to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, my

view was that we would sustain those services for as long as possible and for as long as patient safety allowed. The overriding principle is patient safety: it is literally your lives in their hands.

Mr Dodds asked what had changed. Let me answer him: senior clinicians are leaving the hospital and the service. The senior accident and emergency consultant told me on 26 April that she could no longer sustain the service safely, following the departure of staff on 24 May, and I had no choice but to follow the guidance laid down by senior clinicians working in the trusts. With regard to staff, I regret the short period of consultation, and I will certainly take steps to ensure that unions are better informed and better included in any subsequent decisions that have to be made on any other sites. No staff will lose their jobs, there will be no redundancies, and all service staff will maintain their employment on the current site; however, it will affect doctors and accident and emergency nurses. I am assured by clinicians and the trust that Antrim Area Hospital can cope and that the strengthening of the service by the addition of staff from Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster hospitals will create a better service in Antrim.

At present, more than 70% of visits to the accident and emergency departments at the Mid-Ulster Hospital and the Whiteabbey Hospital involve minor injuries, so we are not talking about all visits. Of the remainder, several will not involve admissions. I have sought and been given the assurance that with the changes that are being laid down in Antrim Area Hospital, such as additional beds, the changes to the accident and emergency department will all be accommodated.

I would have preferred the service to continue for as long as possible, and I made that clear to the trusts on a number of occasions. However, when the senior accident and emergency clinician and her staff told me that patients could come to harm given the vulnerability of the service, I had no choice but to act.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This decision, which was signed off by the Minister last September as part of the CSR proposals, compounds the dereliction of health services in mid-Ulster and, again, the people of mid-Ulster have been

stripped of a health service. Some people will no longer live within the so-called golden hour of access to hospital services, and the Minister is quoted as saying that that time frame is key to survival rates in emergencies. People living in Pomeroy, for example, will not be able to access a hospital within an hour.

The sudden move is a disgrace. The Minister has abandoned the people of mid-Ulster and stripped them of their services. When the proposal was first mooted in the CSR proposals, we were told that nothing would happen until there had been full consultation with staff. The Minister said that there had been a long run-in period and that the decision had been in the ether since 2002. That may well be, but staff learned of the decision in the media last week, which is disgraceful and unacceptable. Morale is low. The Minister has not consulted trusts' staff and could not possibly do so within the two-week period. We were also told that the move would not happen until Antrim Area Hospital had the capacity to cope.

Will the Minister assure the House that additional capacity has been made available in Antrim Area Hospital? I am sure that it has not. Indeed, we have heard reports this morning of an 18-bed trolley wait, which is disgraceful. Will the Minister tell the House what investment has been made in Antrim Area Hospital to allow staff to cope with the change? We are clearly of the view that they cannot. Furthermore, what consultation has he undertaken with staff? Staff have said that that has not occurred.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am entitled to answer one of those questions and to pick the one I want to answer. The Member should be careful about going on and on and on and on. I am trying to give the House the necessary information.

I remind the Member that the Developing Better Services document was developed in 2002 by a devolved Minister from her party. Sinn Féin's fingerprints are all over DBS, and that party cannot walk away from responsibility. *[Interruption.]* The Member's comments on the stripping of services are highly emotive and are, in fact, scaremongering. There is no question of stripping services away from the Mid-Ulster Hospital *[Interruption.]* The Members from Sinn Féin can ask me questions, or they can catcall and shout at me from a sedentary position, but DBS is a Sinn Féin as well as an Assembly

plan. That party envisaged that the closures would occur at the Mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey hospitals, and I have ensured that both have a long life ahead of them. My Department did a similar thing with Omagh, although that hospital as well as the Mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey hospitals need investment. Sinn Féin can help by supporting the Health Service in the Budget, rather than voting for cuts.

The survival of the hospitals is ensured. There will be no redundancies, and all service staff on those sites will keep their jobs. The closures will affect nurses and medical staff, and the Department will work very closely with them. I will also take steps to ensure that the unions are better informed in the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given some latitude to Mr Dodds who tabled the question and to the Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee. From now on, questions must be focused and Members should ask only one question each. Furthermore, no more remarks from a sedentary position are to be made.

Mr Cobain: I will try to be as brief as possible. I thank the Minister for his guarantee of no redundancies on the Whiteabbey site, and I am sure that the staff there will also be glad to hear that. Can the Minister also guarantee that continuing investment for the Whiteabbey Hospital is at the forefront of his mind?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can. I recently invested in both the Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster hospitals, and I have other investments planned. That investment will further strengthen both those sites and, as a result of those investments and the changes to services that I am making, we will see increased activity in both sites in the same way as in Omagh. Whiteabbey Hospital is very much part of the local hospital network and will play a key role in relieving the acute hospitals in Antrim and elsewhere.

The Northern Trust will maintain medical cover on both sites for the next two months to ensure a smooth transition. However, when people look at the steps that we are taking in the cold light of day, they will realise that it is better to have the services we have planned, not least because it will enhance and reinforce the services in the A&E and acute hospital in Antrim.

Mr A Maginness: I am reassured by and welcome the Minister's comments on

redundancies. I also remember the havoc left by Bairbre De Brún when she was Health Minister, and when she also tried to remove acute services from the Mater Hospital. Fortunately, the community revolted against that and defended the Mater.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister reassure the House that Antrim Area Hospital will be able to cope with the increased workload that the closure of the A&E at Whiteabbey Hospital will inevitably create?

3.45 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes, indeed. I have, of course, sought that reassurance from the Northern Trust and its clinicians, and steps are already in place and are being put in place. It will, of course, mean that a larger team of doctors and nurses will be available to provide care at the Antrim Area Hospital A&E. Additional space will be provided at Antrim Area Hospital, where an additional 20 beds are being put in to deal with the increased demand, and the Ambulance Service is also planning to provide additional cover. I invested in the Ambulance Service at Mid-Ulster Hospital at the end of last year. A number of steps have been put in place, and the necessary arrangements will be in place by 24 May. Medical cover will also be available on the two sites for two months. This week, I will receive daily updates from the trust on the implementation of its plan.

Mr Neeson: Last Friday, I met doctors and other staff at Whiteabbey Hospital. One of the main reasons why I have been opposed to the location of Antrim Area Hospital is its inaccessibility due to the lack of public transport. Not only the patients who use Whiteabbey Hospital but its staff who do not have their own transport will be put to trouble. Does the Minister have any plans to help them? I have benefited from the cardiology unit at Whiteabbey Hospital. Why is it being moved?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The steps are being put in place because of the difficulty in attracting the appropriate staff to Whiteabbey Hospital and to Mid-Ulster Hospital. In fact, we have been relying heavily on local doctors on both of those sites, as has been the case for some time. Everyone knew the plan and intention of our proposals. It

has come out much quicker than I anticipated, and that is because of the inability to maintain the teams in place.

As I said, all service staff will remain on site, and no one will lose their job. It will affect doctors and nurses, and the trust will work its way through with individual staff to ensure that they are accommodated properly.

Mr I McCrea: I thank my colleague Mr Dodds for tabling the question. The Minister will know from previous discussions and debates that there is much emotion in communities about any downgrading of services. The Minister will also know that the decision that was taken was certainly felt in the community. Can the Minister assure the House that adequate facilities will be provided to take the increase in beds in the acute services from Whiteabbey Hospital and Mid-Ulster Hospital, given the fact that, over the weekend and last night, there were approximately 18 trolley waits and other difficulties with people waiting to be seen for a number of hours? Will he also assure the House that the future of the Mid-Ulster Hospital is safe and that more work will be done to provide the much needed level of day care procedures, not just the few that are being carried out here and there?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am happy to give those assurances to Mr McCrea. Both those hospitals now have a strong future. They are very much a part of the network, and they integrate with, support and reinforce the work done in the acute hospitals. Those hospitals are changing services, but medical services are changing all the time. Mid-Ulster Hospital and Whiteabbey Hospital will still be capable of delivering around 70% of the hospital needs in their areas. The minor injuries units, which will be in place at both those hospitals, will accommodate around 70% of the visits that take place currently. Frankly, the number of visits that occur in both those hospitals is too low to sustain a service indefinitely. I had tried to do that, but when safety is in doubt I have no choice but to listen to the views of clinicians.

Staffing is a key part of this situation. The trust and I will do what has to be done to support staff. I will also take steps to ensure that the unions will not feel left out in the cold in discussions when a decision is made.

I was advised of the unsustainable pressures on the hospital on 26 April, so we had a short time

frame in which to work. However, leaving the medical support in place for two months will help.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would have thought that the Minister, being his own man, would have stopped hiding behind former Ministers or the excuse of not having the finances. If the Minister is looking to invest in health, surely he can provide a proper health service for the people of mid-Ulster. That cannot be done safely before Monday 24 May. The Minister should not hide behind excuses. He has had ample opportunity to reverse the situation and put adequate provision into the Mid-Ulster Hospital to ensure that it can continue.

Mr Kennedy: Question.

Mr Molloy: If the Minister's colleague would stop talking from a sedentary position, we could get on with things.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Molloy: Twenty beds have been put in place in Antrim Area Hospital. When will you put in place the beds to ensure that accident and emergency can continue safely in the Mid-Ulster Hospital? You are not doing that, Minister.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am surprised to hear Mr Molloy talking about money being no excuse and saying that I do not have the money but that is not an excuse.

Mr Molloy: You said that it was not a money issue.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Who is talking from a sedentary position now? He also said that I was hiding behind previous Ministers. It is a fact that Developing Better Services came from a Sinn Féin Health Minister in a previous devolved period. Your party was very much involved, as it was in the Omagh decision.

Mr Molloy: You are hiding behind that.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: You are hiding behind a sedentary position. There are pressures at Antrim Area Hospital accident and emergency that need to be reinforced, and this measure will help those pressures. Patient safety is key: your life in their hands — literally. When senior clinicians tell me that patients can or will come to harm if we carry on as we are, I have

no choice but to listen. I have no choice but to allow those clinicians to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Molloy: You are a failed Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: A Deputy Speaker should know better.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I was trying not to make reference to that. Remarks should not be made from a sedentary position. Some people should know that better than others.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is disgraceful for Mr Molloy to tell me to be a Minister and to ignore the safety considerations of patients that are advanced by senior clinicians. It is scaremongering and politicking with a regrettable situation. However, we cannot sustain indefinitely local hospitals with acute services where it is virtually impossible to recruit the appropriate staff and clinicians. In the Northern Trust area, our staff are spread across four accident and emergency departments, and, in future, we will reinforce by spreading across two departments. The people of mid-Ulster and of Whiteabbey will benefit, and the network will be all the stronger for it.

Mr Armstrong: The Minister said that money was not the only problem. What other factors are responsible? How does the Minister see the Mid-Ulster Hospital being developed so that it can serve all the people of Northern Ireland in future?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I think that I have covered some of that, but it is very much a patient safety issue. Had it not been, we could have continued until the anticipated change date, which is some six months away. Unfortunately, the view has been expressed that services cannot be sustained beyond 24 May.

I also believe that Antrim Area Hospital will be able to cope with the extra workload — 20 extra beds are going in — and the investment that I have planned for it, which I have also planned for Magherafelt and Whiteabbey hospitals. All those measures will strongly reinforce the plan. I look forward to Mr Molloy and his party supporting the Health Service's need for a budget rather than his making remarks from a sedentary position and acting most unlike a Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I now call Mr Patsy McGlone for a concise question.

Mr McGlone: My question will be concise, Mr Deputy Speaker, and it will be factual. It is not scaremongering when I say that a distressed father phoned me last night, concerned that his daughter was lying on a trolley in hospital. Nor is it scaremongering when I say that staff have contacted me because they are deeply concerned about the professional services that are provided in the community in which they live — in which I live also — in the Mid-Ulster Hospital's immediate catchment area. What guarantee can the Minister give Members today? The decision to remove A&E services and the high-dependency unit from Mid-Ulster Hospital, as well as cardiology services from Whiteabbey Hospital, was taken on the basis that Antrim Area Hospital would be best able to cater for them, but quite clearly —

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

Mr McGlone: That is part of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker. Last night, there were between 14 and 18 trolley waits at Antrim Area Hospital, and phone calls were being made to Magherafelt hospital asking for extra beds. Initially, it was Antrim Area Hospital that caught the overspill from A&E at the Mid-Ulster Hospital in Magherafelt.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: That was not so much of a question as a press release. I can only repeat what I have already explained. The staff are managing the patient flows and pressures at Antrim A&E, as they do frequently. A trolley is a mobile bed; patients still get the appropriate medical and nursing care. The staff still look after them. If patients are on trolleys, it does not mean to say that staff ignore them. They do not.

As far as changes are concerned, we will reinforce the staff at Antrim A&E. I am sure that the Member has had discussions with the clinicians and the chief executive in the Northern Trust, and I encourage him to continue to do that. The clinicians, who know what they are talking about, will explain the difficulties that they are facing. This is a step and a change that the Member knew was coming, except that it has come a number of months early. That is the unfortunate side of it, but I had no choice other than to permit it to happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the question for urgent oral answer. We shall now return to the business that we left before Question Time, which was the Question on the motion on all-island economic regeneration.

Private Members' Business

4.00 pm

Economic Regeneration

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to explore, through the North/South Ministerial Council, ways to develop policies in conjunction with the Irish Government which benefit both economies on the island, with particular consideration being given to the potential benefits of the harmonisation of VAT rates, taxation systems and corporation tax; and further calls on the Executive to work with the Irish Government to develop an all-island economic recovery and development plan, aligned with an investment strategy, to help address the adverse impacts of the present economic climate. — [Mr Butler.]

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 34; Noes 50.

AYES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr Durkan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McHugh, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr Leonard.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McGimpsey, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Neeson, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr B Wilson, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Kennedy and Mr G Robinson.

Main Question accordingly negatived.

Robberies

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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. *[Interruption.]* May we have silence, please?

Mr I McCrea: I beg to move

That this Assembly condemns the spate of robberies within local communities across Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Justice to produce a more effective strategy to protect citizens' private property and vulnerable people in our society.

We hear constantly on the television and radio and read in newspapers about the number of robberies that are inflicted on communities throughout Northern Ireland. Robberies against the elderly are particularly prevalent, especially around Christmas time. In March, a pensioner from Newtownards died two months after she was woken in the night by two teenagers who were in her bedroom demanding money. After the lady's death, her daughter told the media that, although the lady was not physically injured, she was terrified. She was very frightened not only by her ordeal but by what had happened in her area 10 days later, when another spate of robberies occurred. That tells us that people can be victims of crime through fear of it, even though they have not been targeted directly.

Similar burglaries have been repeated across Northern Ireland. It is thought that senior citizens are being targeted by thieves who are looking for gold to sell to one of the many cash-for-gold companies that promote such offers. Over Christmas, there were also thefts from ATMs. The thefts usually took place in rural areas, which is most alarming because, without access to cash, people in such areas feel isolated.

In 2008-09, 64% of recorded crimes involved property, including burglary and theft. Thirty per cent of all theft offences related to vehicle crime, and, according to the latest Northern Ireland crime survey, burglary represented the highest reporting rate of 68%. It is thought that the main reason for that rate is the number

of people making insurance claims, as they need a crime reference number to do so. However, many crimes are not reported, and the most common reason that people give for not reporting a crime is that they think that the police cannot do anything about it. Burglary has a 12% clearance rate, which is one of the lowest. Therefore, a new focus and strategy need to be developed to combat this type of crime, and much goes hand in hand with community policing. However, many people in residential areas see few or no police patrols. I wish to make it clear that I do not believe that that is the fault of the police. I am sure that Members and people across the country are more than aware that the police lack sufficient resources, especially manpower.

When there is a spate of robberies in a residential area, people, especially the elderly and vulnerable, usually become fearful in their home. The police, through the Department of Justice, need to do more to tackle burglary, because, after all, it is the highest reported type of crime. Burglary is more likely to occur in areas in which there is a younger age group of 16- to 24-year-olds, areas perceived to have a high level of antisocial behaviour and areas containing single adults with children and those living in socially rented accommodation. Such crime against the elderly is low, but it can, nevertheless, have a devastating impact on its victims. It can affect their health, quality of life, independent living and sense of security.

Fear of such crime is high among the over 60s, and that no doubt heightens the intensity of our focus. The police have focused on preventative measures, such as advising people to lock doors. They also advise people to keep windows closed even when they are at home and especially when they are away and to set alarms. People are also told to add security measures such as chains and deadlocks. However, I accept that many households are vulnerable because of the lack of adequate security measures. Those measures and initiatives are all well and good, but they do not necessarily solve the problem. In many ways, that is papering over the cracks. The problem will not just go away.

4.15 pm

We must tackle the serious lack of respect for private property and get to the very root of the problem. Whether that is done by

education or through various initiatives, we must act now. The right to private property and the defence of property are upheld in the American constitution. Sadly, we seem to have less focus on that in the UK, where criminals appear to have more rights than the victims of burglary. If someone chooses to defend their property, a burglar can call the police, and the person whose property is being robbed is then open to prosecution. I have to wonder what kind of society we live in when the rights of a perpetrator of a crime are put above those of a victim. There are also many examples of burglars claiming money for injury sustained on their victims' property. That flies in the face of law and the right to property.

There is an acceptance across society that theft is going to happen and that it will be dealt with as it happens. However, that does not reduce the anxieties faced by communities. It is a sad reality that, according to the Northern Ireland crime survey, 51% of victims of crime feel that no one can do anything about it. That says a lot about the justice system here.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister of Justice to look at this problem in great detail and to go beyond the physical preventative measures to the social solutions. I look forward to this debate on a very important topic that needs to be addressed and to the Minister's response.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. All Members will have had occasion to speak with distressed constituents who have been the victims of robbery and assault. The media frequently report that elderly people have been assaulted, robbed, terrified and sometimes tortured in their homes by criminals. Last week, we witnessed the bravery of a shopkeeper and a customer who tackled an armed robber. I commend those citizens.

Several weeks ago, I visited the home of Seamus Fox, a father of eight who was brutally murdered in west Belfast. Crime, in all its forms, is a major issue of concern for all citizens and one reason why the transfer of policing and justice powers was so important. We now have the tools to begin to reshape our policing and justice systems to take account of the demands and needs of citizens and to put in place laws and strategies that can protect lives and property.

In the meantime, the PSNI and other statutory agencies need to come up to the mark. It is not rocket science. The West Belfast Community

Safety Forum, which was formed two years ago, has a very good strategy for dealing with crime. Last year, the Criminal Justice Inspection, which is the independent oversight body, commended the work of the forum, its strategy and action plan as a template of how anti-community problems could be tackled. However, thus far, the forum and its strategy have been denied the funding and resources to make it work. I have requested an urgent meeting with the Minister of Justice to discuss that issue, and, tomorrow morning, I will meet the PSNI to discuss those matters further.

I raised with the PSNI the recent decision to scrap the car crime unit, which was set up to tackle car thieves and death drivers. A lot of car thieves now steal car keys from people's homes.

The measures that the PSNI could take are straightforward. It must use the accountability mechanisms that were created to ensure maximum consultation with local communities, particularly the local district policing partnerships. The PSNI's significant resources must be refocused on civic and community policing. Additional resources must be put into areas that have been identified as hot spots. What is the point of identifying an area as a hot spot without prioritising it and focusing resources there?

All other statutory agencies, such as the PPS and the Probation Board, must examine their failings in those areas. The local Justice Minister, who has our support, and the democratically accountable PSNI must work with local communities to improve the quality of life of citizens and to provide greater protection from criminals and antisocial elements. That is the crux of the matter, and, in due course, the Assembly must legislate to assist with that.

Community safety, which is the right of citizens to be safe in their home and in public places, will be one of the most important matters that we have to deal with. It will also be a matter on which people judge the institutions as successes or failures.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Members who tabled the motion on such an important subject. I will not be widely contradicted when I say that we are still finding our feet when it comes to the technicalities and details of our role of scrutinising the Department of Justice. I welcome the Minister to the Chamber for his first debate in his ministerial capacity. He will accept that the debate centres

on fear in the community. That fear must be understood and addressed.

The PSNI's latest figures show that robberies have decreased by 0.5%. However, armed robberies have increased by 9.6%. Last year, burglaries increased by 110 cases, or 0.9%, and thefts rose by 1.4%. Thefts within dwellings have increased by 20.5%. The overall picture of the crimes that the motion seeks to address is that we are, at best, standing on the spot. The Minister will agree that there is definitely room for improvement. Although I respect the operational independence of the Chief Constable, one of the positives of having the debate is that my Assembly colleagues and I can press the Minister directly on behalf of our constituents on achieving those needed improvements.

The recent spate of ATM thefts in rural areas is having a demoralising effect on many local communities. Not only is the cash machine, a local amenity, gone, but people may feel isolated and vulnerable. I welcome the move to bring in specialist police to tackle that issue in some rural areas, in addition to their role of combating dissident terrorism. I look forward to an update from the Justice Minister on that issue.

Attacks on elderly people in their homes are, perhaps, among the most cowardly crimes that anyone can commit. The previous Secretary of State produced a strategy and an action plan to ensure the safety of older people. I ask the Minister of Justice what action has been taken on the back of that plan, which was published in November 2009.

I want to make three points about the actions that must be taken to reduce crime against elderly people and to reduce their fear of crime. We must remember that living in fear of crime can and does ruin people's lives. First, we must get more police officers onto the street. I know that that is a hardy annual, but we must do it. To instil confidence in local communities, especially the elderly, police officers must be highly visible. They must also be fully equipped and trained to deal with any eventuality. Is the Minister in a position to provide an update on the target to deliver 600 officers back to our streets to fight crime? What progress has been made on reducing paperwork and the amount of administration in the PSNI?

My second point is that we must build our local communities' capacity to defend themselves

against crime and to help to reassure those living in fear of crime, especially the elderly. What plans does the Minister have for the community safety unit, which was previously in the hands of the NIO and is now in his Department? What initiatives can he introduce to increase community co-operation and, equally important, inter-generational co-operation and support?

Thirdly, we must ensure that, when criminals are caught and found to be guilty, we give them sentences that fit the crime. We must ensure that those who carry out crimes know that, if caught, they will not get just a slap on the wrist. We must also have a Prison Service to back that up and which is fit for purpose to ensure that it can cope with criminals who are taken into its care and ensure that people come out of prison ready to start a different life from that of crime.

I support the motion and call on the Minister to effectively review his strategies to protect citizens and their private property and to address the element and issue of fear in our communities, particularly among the elderly.

Mr Attwood: I also welcome the debate. It is particularly timely to probe the Minister's mind on the issue, which registers so deeply across communities in the North. My comments will be very much on the right side of the demarcation line between that which properly falls to the Chief Constable and the Policing Board and that which is the responsibility of the Minister. In that context, I have four questions to put to the Minister on four issues, on which, I hope, we will hear his view today or subsequently.

The first is that, when it comes to burglary and protecting private property and the vulnerable, the worst type of burglaries are, obviously, those that are aggravated and lead to death. In that context, mindful that Jack Straw, the previous Justice Secretary in England, commissioned a report and accepted its recommendations for tougher laws and penalties for knife crime and given the awful experience to which Mr Adams referred that led to deaths in my constituency in West Belfast and in others, is the Minister minded to introduce a law that would lay down tougher penalties for knife crime, such as those in the recommendations that Jack Straw accepted when he was Justice Secretary in London?

Secondly, to protect private property and vulnerable people, the Public Prosecution Service must operate to its optimum, maximise the management of cases and produce results.

The Minister will know of the concerns around the Public Prosecution Service about what is perceived to be and, in my view, is a culture of plea bargaining, in which only cases that have a high likelihood of success are taken forward, leaving families and victims in the dark about why counsel recommends the dropping or reduction of charges.

Given those facts and all the other concerns about the management and outcomes of the Public Prosecution Service, is the Minister minded to initiate a review of the Public Prosecution Service to look at governance, management, the management of files generally and the concerns about how they manage particular cases, without crossing into the independence and operational responsibility of the PPS? Given the profile around that issue, it is about time for our Government and the Minister to indicate their thinking on that.

The third issue is that, independent of a review of the PPS, there is a wide body of recommendations from the Criminal Justice Inspection that impact on the wider criminal justice family, the PPS and PSNI in particular. Many PPS recommendations were made in the original baseline PPS review by the CJI in June 2007, updated in June 2009, in which the PPS, in a quite withering way, is indicted for its failure to implement many of the recommendations of the original baseline study.

I do not believe that the PPS has the capacity and the wherewithal to take those recommendations forward. The SDLP view is that a different body of people — a panel of specialists and experts — should be brought in to ensure that those recommendations are implemented, in co-operation with the PPS leadership.

4.30 pm

Is the Minister minded to create a mechanism whereby the recommendations that impact on the wider criminal justice family, the PPS in particular, are taken forward in the absence of the PPS doing so? His predecessor Minister Goggins considered that issue in autumn 2009, but it seemed to run out of steam.

Mr McNarry mentioned my final point. Given the need to have confidence in the way in which the judiciary manages cases and imposes penalties and the Minister's personal commitment to the creation of a sentencing guidelines council, is

he in a position to confirm whether he intends to legislate to create a sentencing guidelines council so that the mind of the judiciary is informed of the views of the wider community without impeding its independence?

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

Mr Attwood: Is the Minister minded to bring forward that legislation and, if so, when?

Dr Farry: Like other Members, I welcome the fact that the Assembly is debating justice issues. It allows us a more rounded approach to the issues that affect people in Northern Ireland. We look forward to many more occasions such as this one.

Robbery is clearly a major issue in society. It is about theft with the threat or actual use of violence. The effects are many and go beyond the loss of property. It also concerns the personal violation felt by the victims, physically and mentally. Fortunately, levels of crime in Northern Ireland are generally low. Indeed, as other Members said, our senior citizens are the least likely to be victims of crime. That said, there can be no room for complacency. Individual victims are not interested in statistics; they are interested in what happened to them and what is being done to pursue those who are responsible. We must also acknowledge the particular effects that businesses feel. In particular, the small business sector feels especially vulnerable to robbery, given the nature of its businesses and the fact that staff work late at night, often in small shops.

The response to the situation must come from across and beyond the criminal justice system. As other Members said, the PSNI has a major role, through the prevention and detection of crime. It is, however, for the PSNI, in conjunction with the Policing Board, to set out the service's strategic and operational priorities. Indeed, I am sure that the PSNI will take note of the comments that have been made in the debate.

Mr Attwood stressed the key role of the Public Prosecution Service. Clearly, the PPS has an important role in the prosecution of offences. In hindsight, it is a matter of regret that the PPS is so much at arm's length from the accountability measures for other agencies. I appreciate the fact that there are good reasons why that has been so, but society is moving on. Although we should not second-guess the

operational decisions of the Director of the Public Prosecution Service, there are issues about financing and PPS policy that are matters of public concern, and it is important that we comment in that context. There is a lack of confidence in the integrity of sentencing, and I look forward to a consultation, in the short term at least, on a sentencing guidelines council, which may lead to legislation in due course. We must go through a process.

We must also ensure that a wide range of responses is available to the criminal justice system. A community response to some non-violent offences may be effective. It is not about being soft on criminals; it is about solutions that work and avoiding situations in which people are more likely to reoffend.

There is a need for a custodial sentence where violence is involved. At that stage, the Prison Service, along with others such as the Probation Service, has a major responsibility to work to reduce reoffending. Virtually everyone who goes into prison will come out of prison some day. It is important that they go on to lead proper, responsible lives rather than returning to a life of crime. It is also important that we pick up on the needs of victims and witnesses and ensure that we have proper strategies and programmes in place to provide not just services but proper information on how cases are being taken forward.

We must also look to the wider issue of crime prevention. Although the Department of Justice and its agencies have a role, those involved in health and education, as well as those in civil society, have a responsibility to prevent young people in particular from entering a life of crime and trying to pick up on warning signs early on and intervene to steer people in a different direction. Ultimately, the key response that the Department can make in the immediate future is through community safety measures. Consultation on a new partnership model is under way, and beyond that I look forward to seeing a new community safety strategy for Northern Ireland, as the old one is now out of date.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Dr Farry: It is important that, under devolution, we take full advantage of all Departments contributing to a more rounded strategy on the way forward.

Lord Morrow: I apologise that I will have to leave immediately after speaking; I was supposed to

be at another meeting in the Building at 4.00 pm. I would have liked to hear the Minister, but my leaving is no slight on him, and I mean no disrespect or disregard.

I commend the proposer of the motion. It is appropriate that the motion should be brought at this time. It is a topical and serious issue that causes much concern across the whole of Northern Ireland. It is difficult — indeed impossible — to lift a newspaper or turn on a television without hearing of another burglary or robbery. The victims, usually elderly, are left shaken and traumatised; the independence of many is irreparably damaged. Many live in fear that the criminal, if he or she is arrested, will soon be back on the streets carrying on with what they do best. Just this morning, I learned that an 86-year-old woman was the target of a distraction burglary carried out by a male who claimed to have called at her home to check the drains. That is typical of what is going on across the Province. I hope that the PSNI, under the direction of the Chief Constable, will grapple with the problem.

My constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone includes the town of Dungannon, where there has been a 236% increase in violent thefts in the past year. That is not something that Dungannon is proud of, but it is fact. That is by far the steepest and sharpest increase in any town or area in Northern Ireland. I refer Members to a headline that recently appeared in a local newspaper:

"Surge in violent crimes in Dungannon".

The report states that:

"A crime wave of shocking proportions has hit the Dungannon area with a 236 percent surge in violent thefts in the past year, the steepest rise in Northern Ireland."

It goes on to say that:

"Dungannon is one of the worst hit districts for house burglaries with a 54 rise in the past year, and a 48 increase in other burglaries".

Those figures were released by the PSNI and make startling reading.

Sadly, Dungannon is one of the worst districts for house burglaries. It bears repeating that there has been an increase of 54%. That is enough to cause alarm in anyone's estimation. Those statistics cannot be overlooked or discarded. Dungannon Court House has 36

alleged robbery-related offences on its list for this week. Of those charged, six are youths. Those six cases form part of a total of 12 cases relating to youth-involved robbery in a court jurisdiction that also takes in Strabane and Omagh. Therefore, according to the figures, 50% of youth-related robbery in that court jurisdiction takes place in Dungannon. One of the 36 alleged robberies in the Dungannon and south Tyrone area is particularly severe and involves an alleged burglary with threats to kill and cause grievous bodily harm.

No one can be satisfied with that state of affairs. Indeed, there is a clear message that something fresh must be tried, because current legislation is obviously not sufficient. The existing deterrents need to be looked at again if such behaviour and robberies are to be stamped out. Local communities need to feel safe in their own homes. Given the level of crime, particularly in the Dungannon district, can the Justice Minister move to reassure citizens of focused efforts to drive down crime? The Minister is only just into his position, and we do not lay any charges at his door. However, he has a big task ahead of him and needs the support of the whole community and the House.

I recently spoke out about the availability of ASBOs. There are currently 39 ASBOs in place in Northern Ireland.

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

Lord Morrow: I will. Significantly, not one of those ASBOs was served in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like all the other Members who have spoken, I commend Mr McCrea for bringing the motion to the Assembly this afternoon. I have no hesitation in giving my support and that of my party to what is a timely and welcome motion. It is a difficult topic to deal with as it involves victims of crime, sometimes very serious crime, across our community.

Colleagues have already referred to particular incidents of crime. The proposer of the motion acknowledged the importance of reminding ourselves that levels of crime continue on a downward trend across the spectrum. However, that does not in any way alleviate the trauma suffered by a victim of crime; that has to be stated and restated. We want to commend

everyone who is involved in trying to tackle these matters at local level, whether that is a local community safety forum, a DPP, the PSNI or another statutory agency.

I do not know the full detail of the situation in Dungannon, but the statistics are startling. It is important that the issue be dealt with specifically and locally in Dungannon, which has a vibrant DPP. The DPP and the police need to get to grips with the trends underlying those figures in the first instance, because we have to have strategies. The PSNI has a responsibility to detect and prevent crime, and the DPPs have a statutory responsibility to monitor the effectiveness or otherwise of policing plans in any area. It is important that there is a clear understanding of what is causing the sort of rise in statistics that Mr Morrow outlined.

I should have declared my membership of the Policing Board before I spoke. The Policing Board is often made aware of the specifics, trends and patterns of local crime. We have introduced a new objective in this year's policing plan, namely to increase the level of reporting of crime. As the proposer of the motion mentioned, it has long been understood that there is an ongoing under-reporting of crime. Indeed, the PSNI would say that, at the highest level, only 40% of crime is reported. The Policing Board has embarked on a strategy with the PSNI this year, and the objective is for at least 50% of crime to be reported. That will mean a 10% increase in the statistics by this time next year, although, hopefully, that will not reflect a 10% increase in actual crime. Our theory is that, if the extent of the problem is not identified, adequate resources cannot be allocated to tackling it.

4.45 pm

It is important, on a number of fronts, to support the motion, and our long campaign to have policing and justice powers transferred to a locally elected representative has been critical. Now, we have a Minister who is elected by this society and accountable to this society through this Chamber. The transfer of powers has successfully been concluded, and we have a Minister in place. It is early days yet, but we must quickly revisit the amended Programme for Government. Therein lies the solution or the genesis of a solution to issues such as this. Through the Programme for Government, we can provide the means of getting a combined

strategy that tackles everything from the sentencing guidelines council through to preventative measures and the way in which we ensure that offenders who emerge from prison do not become repeat offenders. I commend the Minister, and I urge him to apply the political will, as the Minister of Justice representing this Chamber and our community, to ensure that all the agencies work together properly.

The style of policing in the community is essential to the delivery of policing. If the police do not work to secure the full support of the community in an organic partnership, they will not be properly equipped to tackle these matters. It is crucial that the style of policing in the community is agreed on as soon as possible. That obligation lies with the PSNI.

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

Mr A Maskey: Furthermore, the role of the district policing partnerships, in the coming merger with the community safety partnerships, should develop sooner rather than later.

Mr G Robinson: Behind every headline, there is more than a crime number or an insurance claim; there is an individual or family traumatised by the experience of having been victims of robbery. We must not forget the human element that lies behind each press headline. Sadly, it is mainly the elderly and other vulnerable groups who are on the receiving end of some of these robberies.

I will never forget visiting an elderly lady who had been burgled and physically abused by five thugs. Her distress and fear was very obvious. Sadly, her experience is not unique in East Londonderry or any other constituency in Northern Ireland. In some instances, we have seen pictures of senior citizens who have been murdered or battered black and blue for a few pounds. They are easy targets, picked on by cowards who want easy money.

My colleagues have called on the Minister of Justice to produce a more effective strategy. However, it looks as though we need to develop a strategy. I appreciate that the Minister is new to the job, and I wish him well, but I hope that he agrees that this is an area of his remit wherein real progress can be made. As I have said, we are not talking about numbers but about people and families. It is all too easy to overlook that, but any new strategy must have

that consideration at its heart. I am aware that tackling the problem of robberies is not an easy task, but, unless we do so, we will allow the thieving scum who indulge in such despicable behaviour to terrify the vulnerable in their own homes.

There are three things that will be of great help in addressing the issue. The first is to ensure a higher level of community policing; the second is to help the vulnerable to secure their home; and the third is to have a sentencing policy that will act as a deterrent. I also urge local communities to be as vigilant as possible, particularly around the homes of pensioners. For all the cost implications, we must not permit people to live in fear of being robbed in their own home.

With respect to my first point, people find it reassuring to see police personnel in the neighbourhood — on foot, rather than driving past quickly — especially in areas where robbery is a problem. My second point is about a practical way of displaying the Assembly's commitment to tackling the problem. Doubtless, the Minister will look towards the voluntary sector for help in implementing that type of approach. As to my third point, those who commit such acts should receive punishment appropriate to the crimes they commit. Too often, the perpetrators are given a smack on the wrist and told not to do it again. That does nothing to deter those thugs from committing such acts again. Frequently, one hears that individuals with numerous convictions are fined or given suspended sentences. That must stop, or the system will help to make worse the problem of robbery.

Let me return briefly to point one. There is another effect that additional police personnel on the beat may have: they could help to prevent the street muggings and attacks that are all too frequent.

I have mentioned only a small number of points that may be included in an overall strategy to tackle the rising tide of robberies. However, I hope that the whole Assembly will support the motion and that the Minister will begin, as a matter of urgency, the process that is required to develop a new and workable strategy to tackle the problem. I fully support what is a very worthwhile motion.

Mr A Maginness: I also welcome the debate. Crime and its effect cannot be reduced to a series of statistics. Anybody who has had to

endure a criminal attack, robbery or crime of violence first feels hurt, then sometimes injured and violated. The traumatic effect of that on a person's life, lifestyle and family is very serious. It creates great insecurity and causes great suffering. Therefore, we cannot look at the situation simply in terms of statistics.

That having been said, it should be recognised that in real terms our crime levels are falling, not increasing, which is to be welcomed. They are lower than those in England and Wales, which is, again, to be welcomed. Although any attack on or crime committed against the elderly should be seen as a terrible outrage, it must be kept in mind that the volume of attacks or crime against them is lower than that perpetrated on younger people and their households.

Nonetheless, as I said originally, statistics do not matter: a crime committed against a person has a deeply traumatic effect. Therefore, we must seek ways and means to reduce those figures and the potential threat to those who are older and vulnerable, such as single parents, children and young people. As legislators, we demand a strong community policing strategy. A community policing strategy will be most effective in preventing crime because criminals most fear being caught. It is not the deterrent effect of sentencing that they fear most, it is being caught. Hence, community policing and the resources put into it are very important.

We should not see community policing as an add-on to ordinary policing. Policing at large should be community policing. The position should be that an ordinary policeman knows his neighbourhood, the colour of someone's car and the number of children in a household — he is familiar with the area and its people. That is how real community policing is delivered. Achieving that is intensive, but it is the way in which the police can relate to the community and, importantly, the community can relate to and support the police.

In dealing with crime, the Minister of Justice has an enormous task. Of course, as legislators, we must support him. We will use our critical faculties to scrutinise what he and the various institutions in his remit do. However, it is important that we are supportive, that we encourage community policing and provide the resources for it and that we encourage initiatives such as neighbourhood watch, which is also important and chimes with community

policing. In addition, it is important that we look at technological means of protecting people, property and homes and that we provide comfort and support to victims of crime.

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

Mr A Maginness: The sign of a community that really cares is support for those who have been traumatised through crime. Victims can take comfort from the fact that their community truly supports them.

Mr Irwin: I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue, and I thank my colleagues for tabling the motion. Robbery and the theft of property are becoming worryingly commonplace across Northern Ireland. Only a few weeks ago, I suffered the theft of a Land Rover and a cattle trailer from my farm. Therefore, I fully understand the hassle that such crimes cause to those who lose property in that way, not to mention the cost and inconvenience to individuals and businesses. In my case, the people behind the theft used my Land Rover and trailer to steal cattle from a farm a few miles away from mine. Obviously, the perpetrators felt at liberty to steal a trailer and a Land Rover from one farmer and then, using those stolen items, steal cattle from another.

The cost of agriculture-related theft over recent times is alarming. It seems that there is not a week that goes by when we do not hear of a farmer being targeted by people who steal their trailers, tractors and cattle. It is an ever-growing problem, especially in my constituency. However, although one would perhaps relish catching those individuals in the act, there is a more sinister and brutal aspect of stealing that has become prevalent in Northern Ireland: incidents of our elderly constituents being robbed. When someone is confronted and attacked by a masked gang in their home, they must watch, in fear for their lives, as their belongings are ransacked and valuables taken. That is a most horrendous ordeal.

Only a couple of years ago in Tandragee, an elderly council colleague, Councillor Heather Black, went through the trauma of having masked men in her home looking for valuables. The effect on her was devastating. Recently, another pensioner in Mountnorris was attacked, and the money that he had saved for Christmas was taken. I think that five bold men were

involved in that attack in which an elderly man was robbed.

It is no surprise that robbers target the elderly because they know that their victims will be unable to show any great resistance. The callous individuals who are behind those incidents may think that they are on their way to a fast buck. The reality, of course, is that real damage is done in the form of the pain and trauma that is left in the wake of such attacks. I have spoken to elderly people after such attacks, and it is apparent that, although the bruises heal, the emotional scars remain for a long time. We must consider the effects that those attacks have on the elderly population. They live in fear after such attacks. That is an unfortunate reality.

Robbery and the theft of property represent a blight on our communities and are most damaging to the most vulnerable in our society. I echo the calls of my colleagues for a more effective strategy to protect the most vulnerable and, indeed, to reverse the growing perception that the thugs who are behind the crimes are getting away with it while the victims are left to pick up the pieces. That, undeniably, ties in with the need for greater resources for the PSNI and the great need for a visible deterrent. Police patrols are not as visible as they used to be, and that must be addressed. We owe it to our elderly especially and to all our law-abiding citizens to tackle this growing problem. I support the motion.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. It seems that, when we hit times of economic crisis, the number of robberies and burglaries escalates. That has certainly been the case in my constituency of Strangford. I carried out a computer search of my press releases concerning robberies in the past six months, and there were 17.

That is not every one, but it indicates the number of incidents that have taken place. To some people, that may not seem like many, but there would have been a lot more if every robbery had been reported to me. My point is that there are clearly issues in the area that I represent.

5.00 pm

The district policing partnership — I declare an interest — decided to work with the PSNI to support an initiative to address the spate

of burglaries in Ards town centre. In the past six months we have had a tiger robbery, the robbery of a Securicor van at Ards Shopping Centre and a smash and grab at a filling station. Things seem to have escalated to a horrifying scale, and it is clear that decisive and affirmative action must be taken. It is a shame and a disgrace that, over a few weeks, there was a concerted spate of robberies on elderly people in Newtownards town centre. Elderly and vulnerable people have been subjected to a level of theft, and it is clearly distressing that they were targeted at all.

I yin kirk thair wur a wheen o' parishioners at wur robbed oan a Sabbath morn quhan aa thair prayers. They aa heided tae church i thair normal wie an' cum hame tae differ amoonts o' devastation es thair hooses hed bein ransacked an' veluables tuk'. Hit's clear at thon wus a concerted an' dedicated attack oan fowk fae thon kirk at hed a set wie o' gaein an' preyed oan fowk gaein tae church.

One Sunday morning, several parishioners from the same church were robbed while worshipping. They all left church according to their normal pattern and came home to varying levels of devastation. Their homes had been ransacked and their valuables stolen. That was clearly a concerted and dedicated attack on members of that church by people preying on those with established routines.

There was also a spate of targeted robberies in the east end of Newtownards, where elderly people were robbed at home. One elderly lady awoke to see intruders in her room. She was a sweet little lady who was well loved by all who know her. She was also a little bit fiery, but her years meant that most people would have been careful. One intruder kept her prisoner while another went through her things. Not long after that, the lady died. Despite her bravado, I believe that the robbery played a great part in her death. She is not the only lady in that part of town to have been robbed, which is why I contacted the PSNI to address the issue. In particular, with the help of the East End Residents Association, I spoke to the crime prevention officer for the area in order to highlight elderly people's safety needs and to discuss ways to make the town safer. The meeting was a success, and a large number of elderly people came to the office to get free door alarms and details about additional locks. The horrific robbery of that elderly lady in the

town was followed shortly afterwards by other robberies in the Glen.

Through its crime prevention officers, the PSNI is able to assist people and give advice about security measures and aids. However, it was right to bring the motion before the Assembly, because the Minister of Justice needs to know of the blight. We must work with crime prevention officers. However, I am disturbed to hear that the PSNI will no longer utilise crime prevention officers but turn instead to civilian posts. I am not saying for a second that a civilian could not do the job, but a person with 25 years' experience as a crime prevention officer is the sort of person that a community needs to have in place, so I suggest that that is what we should be doing. Is it not better to go to a crime prevention officer who has knowledge and expertise and is able to give advice and allay fears? That must continue, as well as having an effective and co-ordinated strategy to handle burglaries and robberies.

I have no doubt that the PSNI is a superior force and that its officers work hard; however, it needs to have resources in place. Although the Minister of Justice is new to his post, he will know that no matter what area of the Province one is in, in recent months, the number of robberies and burglaries has increased, so now is the time for action. That is what the motion asks for, and that is why I support it. I congratulate my colleagues on tabling it, and I look forward to the Minister's response. I know one thing: the crime prevention officers in Ards need to be kept in place.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): Before today, I never realised why Ministers need so long to respond to debates. Nonetheless, I welcome the opportunity to respond, and I congratulate Ian McCrea and Trevor Clarke on securing the debate. I thank all Members who participated. Since this is my first opportunity to respond as a Minister, no one seems to have given me the blame. Doubtless, things will change.

It is clearly the view of every Member in the Chamber that all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable in our community, have the right to live safely in their home, free from fear and the threat of being burgled. Although Members mentioned different instances in which senior citizens have been burgled, we must recognise that, statistically, crimes against older people are, thankfully, relatively rare in this society.

However, we all acknowledge that one crime is one too many. As a number of Members said, the burglary of a domestic dwelling can have a devastating impact on a vulnerable person — indeed, not only on that person but on their family, their friends and the wider community.

In Northern Ireland, the risk of becoming a victim is much lower than it is in England and Wales, the only area for which we have directly comparable statistics. In recent years, that gap has widened, so the risk is now even less. We all know that there are particular difficulties in particular areas. Indeed, Mr Adams highlighted the hot spots in his West Belfast constituency.

The bulk of the debate focused on domestic burglary. According to the NISRA comparison of crime surveys, the comparative figures show that the recorded crime rates for domestic burglary in Northern Ireland are less than four fifths of those for England and Wales. Of course, we have to take account of the level of reporting, but those are the crime surveys, not instances of the police receiving reports directly after the event. As a result, they are probably the most reliable statistics, and Alex Maskey, with his experience on the Policing Board, made that point.

Not only is our burglary rate lower than that of England and Wales, but, in absolute terms, we are making progress. The number of domestic burglary crimes has fallen over the past seven years from roughly 10,000 to 7,270, which is the figure for 2009-2010.

We heard examples of particular issues. For example, Lord Morrow mentioned the large increase in robberies in his area. The number of robberies in the Dungannon and south Tyrone district increased from 13 to 41. That may be a high percentage increase, but the number of burglaries is low. The Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency has a very low crime rate compared with the rate for Northern Ireland, which we know to be low for these islands. We must face the fact that there has been an upswing in the number of burglaries, although, thankfully, it is a relatively small one. As Jim Shannon said, the upswing is largely down to economic issues. As we heard from all sides of the Chamber, there is absolutely no doubt that there are still too many victims of domestic burglary, and I want to ensure that all victims of crime receive the highest standards of service from the justice system.

I will shortly announce a programme of work that is specifically designed to improve victims' experience of the criminal justice system, and it will include a new code of practice setting out the minimum standard of service that people can expect. The Department of Justice supports Victim Support Northern Ireland to the tune of more than £2 million per annum in grant aid to assist it in its work in supporting victims. The justice Bill, which we hope to see introduced later this year, will make further provisions for victims. In particular, it will provide for the establishment of an offender levy, which will be used to create a victims of crime fund, and for the introduction of special measures to assist vulnerable and intimidated witnesses when giving evidence in criminal proceedings. As other Members said, that will ensure that people are not only caught but caught and convicted safely, with good evidence being given against them.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that the perception in the community is largely that, when the culprits of heinous crimes are caught, their punishment does not fit their crime?

The Minister of Justice: I think that my colleague may have been reading a few lines further down my notes from over my shoulder.

A range of contributions is to come from the Department, largely to do with ensuring that the PSNI is adequately resourced. It is not that the Minister should be second-guessing the Chief Constable's operational decisions. Rather, it is about ensuring that resources are there to enable community policing to move ahead; to support the various regional initiatives through the Organised Crime Task Force; and to tackle domestic burglary, through similar regional initiatives and through support for bodies such as community safety partnerships, enabling them to look at the best local measures to protect their communities.

As a number of Members said, the Chief Constable's actions in the resource to risk programme put 600 police officers on the streets over a very short period, and I believe that in excess of 400 officers have now been moved from desk jobs to real operational duties. That is one major way of instilling confidence in the community that work is being done. However, I suspect that the precise issue as to how paperwork is handled, as well as the interplay between the Police Service and other agencies, is beyond the scope of the debate.

As Minister of Justice, I want to see devolution make a difference. One aspect of that will be the development of a firm, robust and up-to-date community safety strategy, which will, as my colleague Stephen Farry said, have to be rounded, multidepartmental and multiagency. It will also have to involve aspects of the voluntary sector to ensure that we make movement on building a shared future and that we reduce offending so that we can produce the safer society that we all need to see. I believe that devolution provides the opportunity for that more joined-up and cohesive approach to the strategy, and I look forward to working with the Justice Committee, Members and a variety of public agencies as we develop that strategy.

The proposals that we are working on to integrate community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships will provide a more effective delivery and a better focus so that, alongside monitoring the performance of local police, local communities can look to the real issues of concern in fighting crime in their neighbourhoods and can see the action that is needed on that front. I look forward to seeing how that will be shaped as we engage in further discussions over the coming months. Those proposals will be in the justice Bill, and they will allow for better local delivery and accountability for us all.

A number of other issues were raised. My colleague's point as to whether sentencing is adequate in Northern Ireland needs to be re-examined. Similarly, prison reform has been highlighted as a matter of concern. Alex Attwood raised the issue of knife crime, the levels of which are low but worrying. We need to look at whether there are issues with sentencing guidelines, alongside the ongoing Knives Ruin Lives campaign, for example. Those issues cannot be put into legislation this year, as many of them need to be consulted on. However, I trust that I or my successor will be in a position to include those issues in a future justice Bill as the work of the Assembly goes ahead under devolution.

Mr Attwood also talked about reviewing the role of the PPS. There are clearly issues as to the way in which the PPS relates to the criminal justice family. However, I am not going to second-guess the role of the future Attorney General, who will be accountable to the Assembly for the operation of the PPS, rather than the Justice Department. However, there is no doubt that the reports that the inspectorate highlighted show a greater need for involvement

where I do have a role, which is in ensuring that the Criminal Justice Board brings together all the relevant agencies, including the PPS, to ensure that we have the speediest, most effective, most joined-up and successful system of justice possible. I will continue to work on that.

The Department is continuing to work on a number of awareness campaigns that are on the theme that Members talked about, which is that crime prevention is better than cure. I am not giving Mr Shannon any promises as to who will carry out the crime prevention role, because it may be one of those issues where serious consideration must be given to whether it requires the full authority, as opposed to the experience, of a police officer to give people proper advice. However, I can assure him that crime prevention will continue to remain a firm priority for the Department, whatever way it is carried through. For example, the current awareness campaign, Close it, Lock it, Check it, is being delivered across the media, and there will be a range of different opportunities to get that message across. Recently, around 42,000 homes in areas where it was felt that there was a particular need to emphasise that point, including Craigavon, north and west Belfast and Foyle district command units, received a home security pack. Those are all initiatives to encourage the public, the community sector and statutory bodies to work together to ensure that we make Northern Ireland safer.

As I highlighted, crime prevention officers and the work that is done by neighbour policing teams in bodies such as Neighbourhood Watch have a role to play. They work with communities right across Northern Ireland as we seek to develop and move forward the partnership approach that has characterised the PSNI in recent years.

I thank the Members who took part in the debate. I am grateful for the acknowledgement that it is early days for the Department of Justice and that I am not going to be held responsible for everything that has happened in the past, although, no doubt, that will not happen the next time that we meet.

However, it is clear that there are major concerns in this society. Although the rate of domestic burglary and other robberies is low, domestic burglary is an important crime area because of the fear that it inflicts on society, rather than the actual concerns that it creates.

We will continue to work on crime prevention, detection, appropriate disposals, and we will continue to support victims. Although there has been some success in reducing the level of burglary, and although we face particular difficulties in the current economic circumstances, more remains to be done, and we will do it.

5.15 pm

Mr I McCrea: I apologise for not wishing the Minister well in his new post during my earlier comments. He referred to the work he intends to do to encourage people and make the vulnerable feel safer at home. Will he also take on board the statistics for unreported crime and encourage those who fail to give information to the police to do so? That is equally important in tackling the problem.

The Minister of Justice: I take the Member's point and thank him for his good wishes. Alex Maskey raised that point in the context of the work being done by the Policing Board, and the statistics I quoted were taken from the latest Northern Ireland crime survey rather than the number of reports to the police, as the figures appears to be more accurate. It will be a success if, next year, there is an increase in reported crime with no increase in actual crime. I trust that Members will explain to the public, as we debate this issue in the future, why greater reporting of crime is a success and not a bad thing, as superficially appears. There is a real issue around getting the statistics correct so that we can target resources to where they are needed, and I look forward to the Member and his colleagues supporting me on that issue.

There is no doubt that we are now engaged in working to ensure that devolution delivers and that we have an overall community safety strategy for Northern Ireland in which this area can be set alongside others as part of a coherent overall package. We can also make Northern Ireland a safer place and build on the work done by CSPs, DPPs and the wide range of voluntary organisations that work with the institutions of the criminal justice system. There is much more to be done, but under devolution we have the opportunity to develop an effective response in partnership with the range of agencies involved. The entire House and community want to see devolution delivering.

Mr Spratt: I declare an interest as a Member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I thank

all Members who took part in this worthwhile debate and my colleagues who tabled the motion.

I am very heartened today, because there has been unity across the Chamber on robberies and burglaries, which are serious issues for all of our communities. We have also seen the brutalising of many of our elderly folk — a theme that emerged throughout the debate — particularly in relation to thugs who enter the houses of the elderly and the vulnerable and very often come away with small amounts of money, yet leave those people living in fear. Most Members were on the election trail over the past number of weeks and saw old folk locking themselves in their houses even before it got dark.

Mr T Clarke: I apologise to the House for being absent for the debate. I was in another place in the Building.

I visited one elderly woman who leaves money on her kitchen table frequently. She is afraid that she will be burgled, so she leaves the money there in the hope that the burglars will take her purse and leave her alone. I am sure the Member will accept that it is a terrible situation when elderly people are living in so much fear that they must place money strategically in their homes. Losing their possessions is not an issue for them; they are doing it to prevent attack. We have seen so many attacks, and I am sure that the Member will accept the point that I am trying to make.

Mr Spratt: Yes, that is the point that I was trying to make, and it illustrates the genuine fear experienced by the elderly and vulnerable people in our communities.

The other theme that emerged during the debate was the need for highly visible and effective community policing. That is how to assure elderly people and all of the victims in our communities of a police presence in their area, which makes them feel safer. Highly visible community policing will deter many crimes. The one fear of criminals is that of getting caught. Statistics will not prove the good news story that x number of crimes has been prevented as a result of such policing. The Policing Board and the Department of Justice are trying to achieve that aim, and I encourage them to move forward as quickly as possible.

I shall cover some of the issues that Members raised. In proposing the motion, Ian McCrea highlighted the issue of elderly people being

robbed and described how the fear of crime makes victims feel. He also referred to the theft of ATMs, and, although that issue did not come up often in the debate, it has been mentioned consistently by Members. Mr McCrea talked about the lack of police in some areas, and, in doing so, reinforced up the point that we want to encourage more community policing. That is the crux of the matter, and that is what will benefit folks.

Gerry Adams spoke about elderly people in his constituency. He mentioned the recent bravery of a shopkeeper and a customer who tackled criminals. He also mentioned the disbandment of the car crime unit in west Belfast, which has done sterling work in the past number of years. That issue will be raised at the Policing Board, because the unit dealt with car crime that also affected other areas, because the cars concerned were used outside west Belfast. Car crime is a problem for all areas, not only west Belfast. I and other members of the Policing Board will want to know why the unit has stopped its operations.

David McNarry mentioned the action plan for older people and asked the Minister what action had been taken on that. In response, the Minister referred to several areas and talked about some of the security devices that have been provided to elderly people through schemes such as those run by community safety partnerships.

Alex Attwood raised several issues with the Minister, particularly those aggravated burglaries that lead to death. He asked the Minister whether he would introduce the same tougher measures and laws on knife crime as the Home Secretary has introduced. The Minister said that the Bill that is due to come before the House will cover many of the issues that were raised by the PPS and the recommendations on criminal justice.

Stephen Farry mentioned the level of crime in Northern Ireland, and he talked about elderly people. He said that the PSNI had a major role to play in the prevention and detection of crime. Those should be the two main principles of any police service.

The fear among elderly people came through in the remarks of the Chairperson of the Committee for Justice, Lord Morrow, who mentioned a "distraction burglary". Someone called at the home of an 80-year-old to say that he or she

wanted to carry out work around the house. During that time, however, the house was burgled.

He also said that there was a 236% increase in crime and a 54% increase in burglaries in Dungannon. That is high for that rural area. The Minister referred to the number of robberies in the Dungannon area. He said that they had increased from somewhere in the region of 14 to 36, or some number around that; I did take a note of it. Sometimes, the actual numbers and the percentages are completely different when they are looked at together.

Alex Maskey referred to the difficulties that are caused by serious crime and the trauma felt by victims of crime. He mentioned the need to get to grips with trends in local areas, and he suggested that the DPPs have an active role to play in that. He also said that the Policing Board has initiated a new objective to increase the number of crimes that are reported.

Alban Maginness mentioned the elderly as well, and he said that there was a need to reduce crime. He mentioned the community policing strategy, which is important to all of us.

Jim Shannon referred to the number of crimes in the Strangford area, and to the elderly. He also mentioned the importance of crime prevention.

The Minister said that Northern Ireland is a safe place and that there is less crime in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. The NISRA figures show that. He mentioned a number of programmes and answered a substantial number of questions that were asked.

This has been a good and sensible debate, and it shows that crime affects all of our communities in the same way. We can sit in the House and have proper debates about these issues, and I welcome the fact that that is what we have done in this first justice debate. I recommend the motion and ask the House for its unanimous support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly condemns the spate of robberies within local communities across Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Justice to produce a more effective strategy to protect citizens' private property and vulnerable people in our society.

Adjourned at 5.28 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 18 May 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums

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 are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Butler: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern about the higher premiums that drivers have to pay for car insurance in comparison to drivers in other jurisdictions; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to hold discussions with representatives of the insurance industry with a view to having insurance premiums brought into line with those in other jurisdictions.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle — thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Committees have debated this issue a number of times, and Members have highlighted it in the media. Historically, the high cost of insurance premiums here was blamed on the conflict, or the Troubles, as some people call it. That is why we were hard done by in this part of the world. Other issues have been raised, such as people's postcodes, particularly in the Belfast area, where insurance companies charged people higher premiums than in other parts of the North. Crime in certain areas was also always brought up as a factor.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel has called for an inquiry. I sit on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and representatives from the insurance industry and the Law Society appeared before us to talk about the issue a number of months ago. The inquiry will try to unravel all the claims and counter-claims — to pardon the pun — between the insurance industry and the legal profession

about what is to blame for higher car insurance premiums in this part of the world at present.

In 2009, I wrote to the Association of British Insurers, and I was fairly shocked by its reply. I have the correspondence, which, obviously, I can make available to the inquiry. As far as the association is concerned, the legal system here is to blame. It did not mince its words. It said that lawyers and barristers milk the system and make huge profits, which means that insurance providers must raise car insurance premiums. To be fair to the Law Society, it rejects that accusation. It says that many claims are settled before they even get to court. However, there seems to be a huge, fundamental difference of opinion between the legal system and the insurance industry as to why claimants here get a raw deal.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that there is objective, concrete information that shows that fees that are set for various injury claims in Northern Ireland are much higher than those in other parts of the United Kingdom and that, guess what, claimants have to pay for it? During a recent Public Accounts Committee hearing, it emerged that it is largely members of the legal system who set those fees.

Mr Butler: I am not here to defend the legal system. I take on board what the Member has said. As I said, I received correspondence from the Association of British Insurers, and I think that the legal profession has a case to answer. If it is contributing to a situation in which people get a raw deal, that needs to be addressed.

However, the situation is a wee bit more complicated. As I said, I am not here to defend the legal system. However, there is also, for example, the issue that the Law Society brought to the attention of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment concerning third-party capture, whereby insurance companies try to get their

clients to settle before they go to their solicitors, have medical reports carried out, and so on.

Claim management companies must also be factored into the discussion. They are a problem throughout the UK, and not just with regard to car insurance. Those companies are unregulated and make huge profits. On Monday 25 January 2010, Maggie Craig, a leading member of the Association of British Insurers, revealed in a letter to the 'Guardian':

"For every pound paid in compensation an extra 40 pence is paid in legal costs."

Furthermore, she stated:

"Legal costs are completely disproportionate and are paid for by everyone in society, whether it be British businesses and motorists having to pay higher insurance premiums".

Obviously, Ms Craig was speaking in the context of Britain. However, those claim management companies also operate here. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment received evidence that such companies make huge profits and are unregulated.

Therefore, all those issues must be taken into account as well as the historical background to the car insurance industry here and the perception that higher claims were due to conflict and car crime, which is euphemistically called joyriding.

Endsleigh Insurance produced a report showing that Belfast is one of the safest cities in these islands. I believe that that has been the case for eight years running. However, there is also evidence showing that people pay much higher insurance premiums in some parts of Belfast, particularly in the west of the city, such as in postcode area BT17.

It does not add up: on the one hand, research shows that car crime has been reduced and that Belfast is one of the safest cities in these islands; on the other hand, people are still being hard done by because of car insurance premiums. Some of the stuff in the Consumer Council's report, which considered people from rural and urban backgrounds and from low-income and high-income backgrounds, shows evidence, on every measurement, that people here are being hard done by.

There has been some welcome news in recent times. As we all know, many insurance

companies, when operating on comparison websites or advertising on the TV, state that offers that apply in the UK do not apply to Northern Ireland. Quite rightly, people were getting annoyed about that. I think that there has been some change in that in recent times, and those insurance companies are now offering their deals here.

A comparison was made with Britain, where people have a choice of about 60 insurance companies, so they can shop around; whereas here, there are only 15 companies. That increases car insurance premiums.

Hopefully, all parties will support the motion and try to do their best. We should see what the Assembly can do, through the Minister and the Executive, with the car insurance industry and with the Law Society, which, as Roy Beggs pointed out, has a part to play. If legal costs, compensation and the legal system here are contributing to higher premiums, we must look into them. Claim management companies should also be considered. If they are unregulated, concerns are immediately raised about what profits they are making and whether they are contributing to the high cost of insurance.

Sin a bhfuil le rá agam. Tá súil agam go mbeidh gach duine sa Tionól ag tabhairt tacaíochta don rún seo inniu.

Mr Craig: You will be glad to hear, Mr Speaker, that I support the motion.

The Consumer Council report on insurance premiums that was published just a few weeks ago found that Northern Ireland was badly disadvantaged with regard to competition and pricing in the insurance industry. In fact, the report indicated that, on average, we were paying £282 more for car insurance than people in the rest of the UK. One has to ask why the gap is so large.

I note that the motion calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to hold discussions with insurance companies about greater competition. I welcome that, because one of the anomalies in Northern Ireland is that although a number of named companies hand out insurance in Northern Ireland, in reality there are only four main backers of those companies. There is a restriction that anybody who watches the insurance advertisements on television will be fully aware of: the exclusion stating that an offer does not apply in Northern

Ireland comes in far too often. There is an unfair disadvantage in Northern Ireland when it comes to competitiveness in that market.

However, the issue does not rest solely with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; it is also an issue for the Minister of Justice. The report highlighted the fact that the cost of the legal process here is much higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. For example, the method of calculating payment for legal representation in Northern Ireland is different from that in England, Wales and Scotland.

Legal representatives here are likely to get more money for their work than those in England and Wales. Personal injury claims and claims for damages as a result of road traffic accidents are excluded from the small claims court in Northern Ireland.

10.45 am

Mr Spratt: Does the Member agree that there is a culture in Northern Ireland of making what might be classified as fraudulent claims, where accidents are set up in certain areas and personal injury claims are made as a result? Does he also agree that that increases the pressure on insurance companies in the Province? Furthermore, does he agree that the Police Service and the Department of Justice should attempt to get on top of that?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr Craig: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I concur with those comments. Clear evidence exists that fraudulent claims are being made in certain areas of Northern Ireland. One has only to look at the figures for all types of claims by geographical area to recognise that a pattern is developing in some areas. Those claims must be investigated and dealt with.

We must question why road traffic accidents are not dealt with in the small claims court. That is an obvious issue that the Minister of Justice should look at.

The amount of compensation that is awarded in Northern Ireland is much higher than elsewhere in the UK. Someone who suffers a severe neck injury in Northern Ireland is likely to get between £30,000 and £265,000 in a claim. In comparison, someone who suffers the same type of injury in England or Wales is likely to

get between £14,500 and a maximum of £86-odd thousand. Therefore, that is a massive difference for insurance companies to have to pay out, and it leads me to ask why there is such a huge difference between the amounts awarded for claims in Northern Ireland and those elsewhere in the UK. Therefore, there is plenty of work for the Minister of Justice and the Committee for Justice to look at.

The report also found that people in Northern Ireland are more likely to make a claim than those in the rest of GB. No matter how often I went to America years ago, I always had to remind myself of how everything that happened there was quickly followed in Northern Ireland. The claims culture has, unfortunately, followed us here from America. We need to take cognisance of that, because the more claims, the higher the insurance.

I accept that insurance companies have a role to play in offering more choice in Northern Ireland. Given that some of those wonderful television adverts for car insurance often exclude Northern Ireland, I advise people to look at some websites, because I can attest to their competitiveness. One such website is advertised by a little furry Russian animal; I am not going to advertise for it, but we all know which one it is. I deliberately used such a site last year for my car insurance, and I was amazed to find that I was able to get the same insurance cover for 40% less than the previous year's price. I am one of those people who normally shops and phones around for insurance, and the good news for people is that there are tools that they can use to drive down their insurance costs. However, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have a role to play in addressing that issue.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Cree: I, too, thank the Members who tabled the motion for raising this important issue. Households in Northern Ireland have been paying excessive amounts for vehicle insurance for far too long, while the cost of such insurance in GB has remained consistently lower. Last year, a Consumer Council report detailed that Northern Ireland customers are paying an average of 84%, or £282, more than those in Great Britain. Although it is understandable that the cost of some services, such as legal services, may differ between regions, I feel that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

and the Department of Finance and Personnel must seriously scrutinise whether more costly services justify the massive scale of differential in premiums between Northern Ireland and GB.

The real reason for the price of our insurance premiums is more complex than higher legal costs. A key factor may be lack of competition in the market. Some Members have already referred to the fact that our TV screens are flooded with insurance companies offering affordable insurance, only to be followed by that all too common tagline, "Not available in Northern Ireland". When the Consumer Council looked into the issue further, it found that there are only 15 insurers offering quotes to people in Northern Ireland, while in GB the figure is 51. The highly restricted lack of competition in the Northern Ireland insurance market means that the industry is rarely compelled to lower its prices. Occasionally, our insurance market is given a boost, such as last month, when the Ulster Bank announced that it was entering the field. Unfortunately, on the downside, the situation with Quinn Insurance means that the industry has contracted even further.

Young people in particular suffer because of the limited insurance market. It is regrettable that many young people, especially young males, are forced out of the market by premiums that are often well over £1,000 for one year. Sometimes, the premium is even higher than the value of the vehicle. Unfortunately, unrealistic choices such as that make it only too tempting for some young people to drive without insurance, which should certainly not be permitted.

As was touched upon by the Member who spoke previously, insurance fraud is one aspect of vehicle insurance that should be given significant attention. Insurance fraud is not a victimless crime. On average, honest motorists have to pay an extra £44 for their annual premiums. I am glad that, in recent years, insurers have ramped up their efforts to weed out cheats. However, the more sophisticated the methods that insurers use to track them down, the more sophisticated the schemes that are developed by the fraudsters.

It is not only higher premiums that insurance fraudsters inflict upon the people of Northern Ireland. Another, more sinister, threat that drivers face is being physically caught up in a scam through no fault of their own. Some fraudsters have absolutely no regard for the

safety of other road users and will intentionally cause road traffic accidents, particularly at roundabouts, so that they can blame the innocent parties and submit large claims.

Despite more and more people shopping around our, albeit limited, market online and, ultimately, buying their premiums online, Northern Ireland still faces rising motor insurance. Unfortunately, there is little that the House or the Minister can do quickly to rebalance the prices that people in Northern Ireland pay for insurance. However, it would undoubtedly be worthwhile for the Minister to hold discussions with representatives of the insurance industry, with a view to bringing our insurance premiums into line with those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, I support the basis of the motion. However, I stress the need for the Minister to look at all relevant avenues to ensure a competitive insurance market in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat: I support the motion in the expectation that it will bring about a radical rethink of how insurance companies treat people in the North. It has been clear for many years that the market in Northern Ireland is not competitive and people are discriminated against. The insurance market is not a level playing field and the existence of exclusion clauses, as was referred to, run contrary to the concept of insurance, which is the spreading of risk.

The insurance trade does not have a glorious history. The idea of pooling risks began in Edward Lloyd's coffee house in London in 1688. Among the coffee drinkers was a growing band of ship owners who, although they were making their fortunes running slave ships, were frequently losing their vessels on the high seas. Those vessels of death needed insurance, and so the principles of insurance were developed by the great and the good who went to Edward Lloyd's coffee house.

Thankfully, the slave trade is no more. However, it seems that insurance companies that operate in the North are still not squeaky clean and are not prepared to spread or to share the risks. Interestingly, those insurance companies are involved in cherry-picking. There should be concern in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that everything is not rosy in the garden. With Quinn Insurance no longer trading in the North, the situation has become even more serious.

There is a real opportunity for the Assembly to seriously challenge the insurance industry to take a look at how premiums are calculated. It should look not only at how regional variations are calculated but at how individual groups are paying over the odds. For example, young people, who have already been referred to, are perceived to be a bad risk and have their premiums loaded from day one in the expectation that there will be claims. There is no incentive for young people to drive carefully and to avoid claims. The premiums that young people have to pay make no contribution to road safety and smack of the stick rather than the carrot.

People who live in working class districts are discriminated against because of their postcodes. In some cases, it is possible to find people who live one or two miles apart but pay substantially different premiums. That is wrong.

The principles of insurance that I mentioned earlier are fine. The concept of the pooling of risks is clear, and insurance companies are entitled to a profit in return for sharing those risks. However, the companies are not entitled to rip off policy holders because they live in Northern Ireland, they happen to live in a particular postcode or they happen to be young.

The motion calls for discussion with representatives of the insurance companies, with a view to bringing insurance premiums into line with those in other jurisdictions. I hope that the Minister will go a lot further and legislate to outlaw the kind of discrimination that is taking place and encourage the insurance industry to be more progressive and less regressive in how it handles its business.

As has been mentioned, there are issues involving compensation for personal injury, legal fees and false claims. In addition, a very high number of vehicles are not insured at all. All those factors influence premiums, but they are no reason for accepting the present system, which is clearly discriminatory.

A number of Members talked about getting their insurance quotes online. I have had the same broker for the past 40 years, and he provides me with an excellent service. I strongly recommend that people to go to their local broker for the best advice on insurance. I have never found my broker wanting. The brokers are not the problem. The problem is the insurance companies and how they operate.

Mr Lunn: I am really glad that Mr Dallat finally mentioned insurance brokers. I am a former insurance broker, and I am going to swim against the tide a wee bit on behalf of my professional colleagues from three years ago.

The Consumer Council report has been much referred to. I was at the launch of that report, along with a number of brokers and insurance professionals. I do not want to be unkind to the Consumer Council, but the general description of the report was that it was rubbish.

The report's strapline was that all consumers here pay much more for car insurance. That is not right. The report said that consumers here were quoted £282 more than average comparative consumers in Great Britain. I would love to know what an average comparable consumer in Great Britain is, because Great Britain is covered by postcodes as well. Neither Member who mentioned that figure went on to say that the same report stated that consumers could save £267 by shopping around. Therefore, although quotes were £282 too high, one could save £267 of that by shopping around. The report should have referred to best prices rather than median prices or the highest prices.

Mr Neeson: Does the Member agree that the level of competition among insurance companies in Northern Ireland is not as great as it is in other parts of the United Kingdom?

11.00 am

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

Mr Lunn: Thank you. The figure of there being only 15 insurance suppliers for Northern Ireland was mentioned. That figure is taken from the Consumer Council report and is also rubbish. The Consumer Council took its statistics and figures from only one Internet site, Moneysupermarket.com, which does very little business over here and does not quote any Lloyd's insurers, broker schemes, Direct Line or any direct insurers. The report is, therefore, completely erroneous in its conclusions.

The best premiums in this country are, as Mr Dallat confirmed, available through brokers. The Consumer Council report acknowledged the fact that 49% of all motor insurance in this country is done through brokers, but it did not ask any brokers for a quote. That is absolutely crazy. The figures were 49% through brokers, 49% direct,

14% through banks and 10% on the Internet, and the Consumer Council relied on Internet prices. Does it really think that the Northern Ireland public are so gullible that they cannot shop around to that extent and come up with the conclusion that brokers are providing the best service?

I ran a few quotes just yesterday for my own interest. I tried to compare the Northern Ireland price with a comparable area across the water. It is not an exact science, but I will give Members a flavour. I compared Coleraine with Oxford. They are both commuter towns; one is a bit bigger than the other. The Northern Ireland price for an average risk for a Ford Focus or similar through Moneysupermarket was £335. The best price available through just one broker was £268. The Oxford price was £334.

A lot has been made of young drivers and their problems. I acknowledge that young drivers have to pay a lot of money in this country. There is a reason for that: they have lots of claims. However, let us take a quote for a 23-year-old with two years' no claims bonus in Coleraine and compare that with an address in Leatherhead in Surrey, which, like Coleraine, is a pleasant, semi-rural small town. The Coleraine price was £524, and the price in Surrey was £529. I could go on and cite a lot of examples. I am not saying that we are cheaper than the UK, but the notion that we are wildly more expensive is absolutely misplaced.

When he proposed the motion, Paul Butler mentioned the Troubles. During the worst of the Troubles, there was reluctance by some insurance companies to come over here. I know of at least one that withdrew because of fraudulent claims, which one Member mentioned. It is very difficult to come up with a rate if people are going to crash cars full of people into brick walls deliberately, and that is what was happening. The main company operating the third party capture system, about which Jonathan Craig spoke, was Quinn Insurance, and it is not doing that now.

With regard to postcodes, there are postcodes in inner Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham that are treated more harshly than inner Belfast. I just wanted to set the record straight. As for that business about there being only 15 insurance suppliers in Northern Ireland, the quotes I did yesterday were through just one broker, and there are lots more.

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

Mr Lunn: One came up with 36 quotations. They all had over 30 quotations. There are far more suppliers than the Consumer Council quotes. I could go on, Mr Speaker, but you are not going to let me.

Lord Morrow: In general, we support the motion, although it has a degree of vagueness. It states:

"That this Assembly expresses concern about the higher premiums that drivers have to pay for car insurance in comparison to drivers in other jurisdictions".

I am not sure what that means. I do not know whether it is talking about other regions of the United Kingdom, other regions of Europe or the Irish Republic or what is being compared.

I was interested to hear what Mr Lunn had to say about the Consumer Council. He told us that he did not want to be unkind to that organisation but its report was pure rubbish. If that is not being unkind — it smacks of unkindness — then I wonder what is his definition of unkindness. I do not want to take away from Mr Lunn's sincerity, because I have no doubt that he put a lot of time and thought into studying the matter. He is a former insurance broker and comes to the debate with considerable knowledge that the rest of us may lack. However, I am sure that when he read the Consumer Council's report he was on the phone quickly or that he could trace correspondence to that organisation in which he said that the report was unadulterated rubbish and that it was time that it was withdrawn.

Some of us have been leaning on that report to get some facts and figures, but now we are told that we are dealing with a bundle of rubbish. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment should, perhaps, write to the Consumer Council and challenge it on its rubbish report. Mr Lunn is nodding; he is ready to lead the charge, which we welcome.

The fact remains that insurance premiums in Northern Ireland seem to be much higher than those in other regions of the United Kingdom. That is an issue that the Assembly is right to speak out against, and it must be addressed. Other Members made the valid point that, although colourful advertisements often appear on television here, the small print shows that the offers do not apply to Northern Ireland. That

is outrageous and should not be so. However, that is the position in which we find ourselves.

We all know about the Quinn Insurance situation, which is a regrettable one. Quinn Insurance played a valuable role; it made a valuable contribution to the insurance industry and to consumers in Northern Ireland. Again, I detect that Mr Lunn is not overimpressed by that either. I do not know whether he is just having a bad day or is going to knock all and sundry. I hope and pray that Quinn Insurance gets over its problems because it is a valuable contributor in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lunn: I will provide clarification for the Member. When I was a broker, I did business with Quinn Insurance. During the Adjournment debate on that company's situation on 20 April 2010, I expressed the same thoughts as the Member. I said that I hoped that Quinn Insurance would recover, whether under present management or new management, and continue to do business. However, it was distorting the market, especially in relation to car insurance.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Lord Morrow: I thank Mr Lunn for making the point that he is not as cross about Quinn Insurance as he appears. He just looks cross, and that is fair enough. I know that he wishes that company well.

There is something fundamentally wrong with the cost of insurance premiums here. That must be addressed, irrespective of how sceptical some of us may be. Some of us are tagged as sceptics from time to time. However, it is a fact that — I say this with a health warning for Mr Lunn — the then chief executive of the Consumer Council said that we were paying 84% more for car insurance here than our counterparts in GB. When I read such reports, even if they are not totally accurate, I find it difficult to accept that the figures contained could be out completely. Even if the 84% figure is not correct, it is proper to assume that there is considerable disparity between the cost of premiums in Northern Ireland and those in the rest of the United Kingdom. We need to know the reasons for that disparity. I also accept that, perhaps, the high claim culture that exists has played a part. However, if that is the case, we need to know about it.

One other aspect that concerns me greatly is that it appears that rural dwellers are paying a higher premium than urban dwellers. People who happen to live in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which I do, will in all probability pay higher premiums than those who live elsewhere in Northern Ireland. That is totally unacceptable. People who live in rural areas are being penalised.

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

Lord Morrow: I will, Mr Speaker. People are already being penalised because of the lack of a good bus or train service, and startling figures now indicate that our premiums are more expensive. Something is fundamentally wrong. We support the motion.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. The issue of higher premiums has been raised with me in my Derry constituency, where there continues to be a lack of affordable insurance across the city. I thank my fellow signatories to the motion and congratulate the members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel on their recent decision to investigate the high cost of insurance here. This is exactly the kind of bread and butter issue that many people across the North want to see the Assembly debate.

The Consumer Council is a valuable organisation, despite what Trevor Lunn says. Many of us have referred to its research in the past and will probably do so in future. However, whatever Trevor's view is, the Consumer Council's research report clearly indicates that there is a serious —

Mr Lunn: I did not say that the Consumer Council is a rubbish organisation. I used that word to describe its report. The Consumer Council does good work, and I hope that the Member accepts that.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Consumer Council does excellent work, and most Members value its reports. A Member who regards a report produced by a particular organisation as rubbish could be implying that that organisation is not up to standard. It is up to Mr Lunn to deal with the Consumer Council on that point.

I read the Consumer Council's research report, which highlights the fact that there is serious inequality in how insurance customers in the North of Ireland are treated. The report states that people here pay almost 84% more on average for car insurance than people in England, Scotland and Wales do. That is almost £300 a year. As Maurice Morrow said, the hardest hit are drivers in rural areas, as well as those in low-income areas. We are concerned about that.

Research that Endsleigh Insurance Services carried out indicates that Belfast is one of the safest areas in the North. However, the Consumer Council research states that a middle-aged driver in an affluent area of Belfast will pay somewhere in the region of £533 a year compared with £329 for someone in Glasgow, while an employed middle-aged motorist who lives in a low-income area of Derry will pay £605 compared with £431 for someone in the north-east of England. That is if the driver is lucky enough to get insurance in the first place, as many companies refuse even to consider customers from the North.

There is also internal discrimination. We witnessed that last year when a leading insurance provider here effectively blacklisted parts of Derry and of north and west Belfast. I will not name the company, but I think that it should reconsider its decision.

Many others simply cannot afford the premiums and, as a result, are forced off the road. Members have probably met people in their constituency who cannot afford the premiums and have been forced off the road simply because of where they live. The insurance industry will argue that premiums are higher here because compensation payouts tend to be higher in the North. There may some truth in that, and it may be something that needs to be debated in the context of the new policing and justice arrangements. However, it is also clear that costs are disproportionately high, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that the insurance industry is using compensation payouts as an excuse to ramp up premiums.

11.15 am

Furthermore, the Consumer Council's valuable research debunks the myth that there is a claim culture in the North or that people who live in west Belfast or in the west bank in Derry, for example, are more likely to be victims of car crime. Jimmy Spratt is not in the Chamber, but

he should revisit some of what has been said on the issue. The people who have looked into the matter point out that the levels of theft and accident here are not significantly different to those elsewhere. Consequently, it is unlikely that there is a higher incidence of claims. A number of issues must be dealt with, and the insurance industry has questions to answer.

It is unacceptable that customers in the North are overcharged and discriminated against. The operation of the system must be reformed, and today's debate will perhaps lead to some consideration of such reform. There must be a level playing field for all in our society. The Committee for Finance and Personnel's inquiry and the talks for which the motion calls will be useful steps towards achieving that. I welcome the support of Members who said that they will support the motion. As I am not sure whether the Alliance Party will support the motion, perhaps that party would clarify its position.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. It is a timely motion, as demonstrated by the fact that literally hundreds of constituents have contacted me about the issue. I have written to people about it and spoken to those responsible. Car insurance is much more expensive in Northern Ireland than on the mainland, and that anomaly must be addressed.

I am aware of students from my area who live and study on the mainland and use their mainland addresses to get insurance premiums at the cheaper rates available cross the water. That is just one example of what is happening, and I suspect that Members around the Chamber will be aware of students from other areas who are in a similar situation. I was annoyed but not surprised to read in the Consumer Council's report that car insurance costs Northern Ireland motorists collectively some £136 million a year more than if they lived elsewhere in the UK.

The same watchdog report claims that companies here can charge £300 extra for annual cover. What is the difference between the costs faced by insurance companies in Northern Ireland and those across the water? Most families have two cars and, therefore, pay an extra £600. That is equivalent to a full year's rates bill for a semi-detached property, which puts the potential savings into perspective. I have put on record my opposition to a postcode lottery for DARD funding. I am no less opposed

to insurance companies discriminating on the basis of a BT postcode.

The Kinsoomer Council has highlighted that drivers in rural and low-income areas are paying the pay over the odds. Again the postcode lottery wrought against you in my bailiwick where you already pay enough without this. As you know you young man in my bailiwick where you was asked to pay almost £2,000 for a five-year-old Corsa because he lives on the Ards Peninsula. The car was only worth £1,500, and he had been driving it for four years. Surely that does not make sense to anyone. It is little wonder that almost one third of local people cannot afford to insure their cars.

The Consumer Council highlighted the fact that drivers in rural and low-income areas have to pay over the odds. Therefore, once again, the postcode lottery works against those in my constituency and other constituencies who are already penalised enough. I know of one young man in my constituency who was asked to pay insurance of almost £2,000 on a five-year-old Corsa because he lives on the Ards Peninsula. The car was only worth £1,500, and he had been driving it for four years. Surely that does not make sense to anyone. It is little wonder that almost one third of local people cannot afford to insure their cars.

Members have highlighted four reasons for the higher than average price of car insurance in Northern Ireland: car thefts in Belfast; the high number of car accidents that lead to claims against Northern Ireland car insurers; large payouts for personal injury claims; and lack of competition in the local insurance market. The relevant Departments are dealing with those matters one at a time. The PSNI is clamping down on car theft, and the courts no longer award such large claims for whiplash and so forth. Most of the problems arise because the insurance companies profiteer from the lack of competition locally, and DETI is involved in dealing with that.

I read that, on average, consumers can save as much as £167 a year by shopping around. In my constituency, a school of motoring offers the Pass Plus scheme, and it teamed up with Hughes Insurance, which is based in Strangford but serves the whole Province. For only £65, the scheme gives new drivers experience, additional skills and the ability to respond to accidents or potential accidents. It gives experience of motorway driving, responding to

skids and driving on busy roads. All-round skills are honed and improved. The basic benefit is that, when someone passes the driving test, he or she qualifies straight away for an insurance reduction that makes it all worthwhile. If we had more initiatives such as this one, it would help to cut costs and, more importantly, possibly reduce the number of accidents. I encourage other Members to ascertain whether similar schemes exist in their constituency, and perhaps they could pursue the issue. I encourage young drivers to be confident and to expand on the skills that they acquired from the regular driving test.

I am sure that I am not the only parent to have worried about night-time driving and so forth after a child first passes the driving test. We need to take some of the financial strain off parents as well as some of their problems and concerns. The Minister is not here today, but I know that she and her Department take seriously their role in making the lives of people in the Province a little easier. She has played her part and will continue to do so, and she will liaise with private companies on behalf of the people of the Province. She can help in this area. I support the motion and urge Members to do likewise.

Mr Beggs: I also welcome the debate. It is good to air our concerns on the matter, because we all complain about expensive insurance claims. As individuals, what are we doing about the issue? What are we doing collectively as an Assembly? We all have a role.

The Consumer Council rightly points out that, as individuals, we can shop around, and competition could force down prices. There is the issue of postcodes. No business will invest in loss-making sectors or provide insurance for an area in which there is a high expectation of crime or fraudulent claims. Therefore, as a society, we must report people who abuse the legal and insurance systems and pass relevant information not only to the insurance industry but to the police because it is fraud. As individuals, we have a responsibility to do that. If we want to avoid carrying extra costs, we must try to drive down the number of fraudulent claims.

Mr Butler: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I will give way later.

I now turn to the role of the Assembly. A recent Public Accounts Committee report investigated

the management of personal injury claims by DRD's central claims unit. It indicated that some 80% of costs, approximately £4 million, are due to tripping injuries. The claimants' legal costs totalled some £1 million, approximately 20% of the costs. Interestingly, the legal costs increased by 50% over the past 10 years — four times the rate of inflation — despite the fact that the costs had originally been higher than comparative costs elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I agree with Mr Craig that, where possible, decisions should be taken out of the County Court and be more appropriately dealt with in small claims courts. That would avoid high legal costs

Who agreed to increase the legal costs?

Paragraph 23 of the Public Accounts Committee report, which was published less than a month ago, states that the costs are based on the County Court fees scale:

"This is set by the County Court Rule Committee, which consists of solicitors, barristers and judges, in consultation with the Law Society and the Bar Council. Fee scales have statutory authority under legislation made by the Lord Chancellor, whose functions in Northern Ireland are carried out by the Northern Ireland Court Service."

Given that policing and justice powers have been devolved, the Assembly has the power to adjust those fees. If we want to reduce insurance costs, we should take action on legal fees.

Compensation incurs additional costs in Northern Ireland. That matter is now also within our remit, and we can act on it. I refer Members to the Northern Ireland Audit Office report 'The Management of Personal Injury Claims' of July 2009. Figure 4 on page 41 of that report states clearly that, regardless of whether injuries are very severe or moderate, compensation levels here are about 100% higher than in other parts of the United Kingdom. Guess what? If more compensation and higher legal fees are being paid, insurance costs go up, and we all pay for that.

I took the trouble to investigate how those fees were determined. As a footnote, the Public Accounts Committee report states that the Judicial Studies Board for Northern Ireland monitors compensation awards and keeps judges up to date on legal developments. The membership of the board is drawn from the Northern Ireland judiciary, and appointments to it are made by the Lord Chief Justice. A look at the board's website reveals that appointees include

the director of the legal system, the current chairman, the Right Honourable Lord Justice Higgins, other members of the judiciary and members of the legal profession. Therefore, we allow compensation levels and fees to be largely determined by those who regularly work with, associate with or may have trained with those who will directly benefit with respect to their fees or their fees as related to the compensation that their clients win. If we want to reduce our insurance claims, there is a clear role for us to take action ourselves. Let us not just moan and complain about it, let us take action.

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

Mr Beggs: If we are serious, if we want to drive down the cost of insurance in Northern Ireland, we must take responsibility and act on our own behalf.

Mr O'Loan: I apologise for not being here for the start of the debate. I was chairing a meeting of the Standards and Privileges Committee, so I hope that I do not simply duplicate remarks that have been made by other Members. I strongly support the motion, and I think that it is good that we are looking at this issue and that other sections of the Assembly are strongly minded to take it further.

Evidence from the Consumer Council that consumers here were quoted premiums that were on average £282 or 84% more than those quoted for comparable consumers in other UK regions shows that the issue deserves to be treated as a very serious problem.

Mr Lunn: I am sorry to harp on about this, and I thank the Member for giving way. The Consumer Council report states that, on average, people were quoted £282 more but could save £267 by shopping around. Surely, the best premium quoted should be used for comparison.

Mr Speaker: The Member may have an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr O'Loan: Thank you. I had intended to address that point anyway, irrespective of Mr Lunn's intervention. I will come to that.

The Consumer Council also tells us that the difference is even greater for consumers in rural and in low-income areas. If we look at the Consumer Council's analysis of why this is happening, we see that it makes Mr Lunn's point: consumers could often save a

considerable amount by shopping around. The council quotes a figure of £267 on average, so one might say, as Mr Lunn has, that those two amounts balance out. However, that does not make complete sense to me. It would do so only if one were to assume that Northern Ireland consumers do not shop around in the way that others do. I am inclined to the view that car owners in other parts of the United Kingdom that are being compared with Northern Ireland in the study shop around in a pretty similar way. On looking further, the Consumer Council states that there is no clear evidence on that point. and it clearly requires further inquiry.

The Consumer Council asks, properly, whether there are barriers to competition. There is clear evidence that there are fewer insurance providers in Northern Ireland. Whether that means that the environment is not sufficiently competitive is not fully clear. The council addresses the important question of whether there are anticompetitive practices. We have no absolute evidence around that, but we need to answer that question.

To the question of whether claims costs are higher in Northern Ireland, the answer is an absolute yes. When one reads that Northern Ireland is responsible for 5.4% of the total payment value on claims but that only 2.6% of cars are registered here, it must be said that there is something very different about Northern Ireland.

11.30 am

On the question of whether the cost of the legal process is higher in Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council tells us that different advice is given by the Law Society and the Association of British Insurers, but I will come back to the Association of British Insurers in a moment. That conflict needs to be resolved. The Consumer Council asks whether compensation levels are higher in Northern Ireland, and the answer is a clear yes — they are higher in Northern Ireland than in England and the Republic of Ireland.

The Association of British Insurers says that there is no fundamental bias against the Northern Ireland property and motor insurance markets. My reaction is, they would say that, wouldn't they? Therefore, I certainly do not take that at face value. The assertion is that premiums in Northern Ireland are affected by the high costs of its legal system. The association offers five ways in which the system

here is different. Property damage claims have to be dealt with in the County Court system, and there is a low small claims limit of £2,000. Indeed, I tabled a question today to the Minister of Justice about that. The system of scale costs here is such that the same costs are payable, whether a claim is £100 or £1,000. The level of damages that are awarded for personal injury claims is higher in Northern Ireland, and over 60% of claims are settled out of court in Northern Ireland, compared with 96.5% in England and Wales. All those points need to be taken seriously, but I do not accept at face value that there is not a question to be answered by the insurance industry here. It has a very serious question to answer.

I am very surprised that this matter has not been addressed after all these years. I congratulate the Consumer Council on bringing it to the surface again, because it has been many years since we heard very convincing evidence on the point that insurance premiums here are unreasonably high. In the interests of their constituents, every Member of this Assembly ought to seek an answer to that issue.

I welcome the work that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has done. I was not able to attend the session during which it took evidence from the Consumer Council, but I welcome the assertiveness on the part of the Committee, particularly Mitchel McLaughlin, in demanding an inquiry and in saying that the Committee is prepared to take the lead. A number of different Committees and the Minister of Justice, because of the legal issues, may be involved, but let us resolve the issue of who will take the lead and exactly how we will conduct the inquiry that is needed.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr O'Loan: Our constituents deserve the assistance of the Assembly in resolving the issue.

Mr Bell: This issue is a concern for many of us across the House. Given its significance, I welcome that Members have brought the debate to the House today. The evidence base very clearly points out that those who are at the most disadvantage are those who are on low incomes. A Consumer Council report from 2007-08 gives the staggering statistic that 58% of households that have car insurance live on less than £11,500 a year, which that means that 42

out of every 100 of those households do not have car insurance.

The issue for many of us is that we have to change the culture that has allowed people to think that they can take a chance and drive a car without being insured. They also think that they can get away with it because they are on a rural road on which there is not much activity. However, my constituency of Strangford has a number of villages, and access is an issue. Someone who lives in Portaferry, for example, can use the ferry, but for many young people who live in places such as Kircubbin, Cloughy or Ballyhalbert, it is imperative that they have personal transport. Public transport is not bad, but it could be improved. However, if many of those young people are to have real employment opportunities and are to give themselves a fair chance and an even playing field, they have to have some form of personal transport.

We hear of young people who are starting out on what is basically the minimum wage and of how they are told that if they want to pick up a car and tax and insure it properly, it will cost them between £1,000 and £2,000 to begin with. Many such young people come to see me, and they are looking at all sorts of initiatives to see whether they can be added to their mother's or father's policy. The fine print may state that they are allowed to drive only so many miles, but they wonder whether they should take a chance and use that vehicle as their main car.

All those issues create barriers and difficulties for young people. In Northern Ireland, we are caught in a vicious circle, because we pay, I think, up to 39% — up to four times — more for car insurance, but we have three times less choice. The longer that goes on, the worse that cycle becomes.

We need to look at Internet access. Although the situation is improving, the base of people in Northern Ireland with access to the Internet is lower than in many other places. In my constituency of Strangford, for a host of reasons — some cannot afford it or have not got around to installing it — many people must come to the library in Newtownards to use the Internet. Some of them drive 15 or 20 miles. For them and for older people, shopping around for insurance quotes on the Internet is not as easy as it is for many. Bear in mind that more than 60% of the population in England, Scotland and

Wales have access to the Internet, whereas in Northern Ireland, that figure is just 52%.

Another critical point is that insurance premiums must be brought down because of reduced car crime. I pay tribute to many of the social workers whom I worked with before coming here. They worked with young people to successfully reduce car crime through therapy, restorative justice programmes and the Youth Justice Agency. In addition, the police specialist car crime units have done good work on the ground. We have to be careful not to pull successful units away from reducing car crime, because we do not want to go back to the bad old days.

As Mr O'Loan said, to prevent unfair monopolies and to encourage competition, we must be constantly vigilant and continue to monitor the situation. If there is substantial evidence that we are being disadvantaged through some sort of cabal, we must address that problem head on. We want fairness.

I would like to conclude by saying that my colleague from Strangford may be going to London, but Strangford will always be in his heart.

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

Mr Bell: I have just two more sentences, Mr Speaker. I appeal to young people to take the advanced driving test. They will get an immediate reward for doing that.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I agree with the Member's final point that taking the advanced driving test helps young people greatly. I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion, and I thank members of the Finance Committee for tabling it.

The cost of insurance is an age-old problem, which, over the years, has not improved. I hope that this will not end up like many of the motions that we debate, whereby, 12 months or three years later, whatever conclusion we reach seems to make no difference, and there has not been the slightest change.

For most people, insurance premiums are about one thing only: cost. The percentage differential between insurance premiums here and what others call the rest of the UK, or anywhere else, is profound. Members said that we should do something about that. Let us see whether we, or others, are right. If a change needs to be made, it must happen on the basis of fairness.

As with many things that we have to pay for here, this area is often abused. When it comes to car theft, we are in the same category as places such as London. That harks back to the 30 years of war, when cars were stolen for all sorts of reasons. Now that we are in new circumstances, attitudes have not changed one iota, and we are still being hammered. Certain areas are still being marked down, and that needs to change.

On the subject of theft and gang crime, every week, particularly on Sundays, professional gangs go around the countryside, casing areas for farm machinery, cars or household items that they might steal. Society and policing must think about how they want to police their areas. Those areas cannot be policed by officers on the beat. That is out of the question, because they just cannot cover the area. However, there are things that people in local areas can do to look after themselves. People should not allow people to drive around in white vans at their ease, because that is what is happening, and it is driving up the price of insurance for everyone, along with all the hassle that people have to suffer because they have been allowed to operate in the first place.

I must mention Quinn Insurance because the situation around it proves a number of things. If Quinn Insurance was able to set its premiums so low, and it was still a profitable enterprise, it goes to show the kind of exorbitant prices that were being asked for and being paid. The payouts and claims at the other end of the scale are also exorbitant. Those who have been in the business for a long time and who are set in their ways of claiming, including solicitors, are claiming higher payouts. The start premium for young people is proof that something is wrong. The fact that Quinn Insurance has been removed from the UK and NI market will raise prices for everyone. The premiums reset have ranged from £1,700 to £6,000 for commercial vehicles, and they have more than doubled for cars. That gives us an idea of what people will have to pay.

It has been pointed out that the car is an absolute must for some young people, especially for those in rural areas who have jobs elsewhere. People can say that public transport is good. However, it is not good in rural areas. It is non-existent for most of us. Therefore, young people must have cars. Perhaps we should ask whether those young people are insured. The

recent incident in which someone fell ill abroad proves that unless people read the small print and dig deep into the wording of their insurance policy, they may find that they are not insured when they hit the wall properly — pardon the pun.

Young people are driving cars that are insured under their parent's name. They are driving to Belfast, and they are not insured for that journey. The young person should be the main driver, and they have not taken that into account. They are getting by for now, but there could be serious difficulty if they had to contest a claim in the courts. That is where the problem lies.

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

Mr McHugh: Yes, thank you. I hope that something will come of this debate, rather than debating the matter just for the sake of it.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to talk about the high cost of insurance premiums. When Paul Butler proposed the motion, he highlighted the issues that come up on everyone's websites and the issues that people complain about, especially young people, who find it hard to get insurance cover. They often find that they cannot get cover and, at times, they put themselves in danger.

The postcode lottery, where people are labelled against the car crime in their area, is important. Car crime may have been a big issue in a number of areas, but insurance premiums do not take account of the fact that measures have been put in place to reduce car crime and to ensure that we have a safer system. We need to raise that issue with insurance companies and the legal profession and let them know that we are in a different mode and that people should have the opportunity to take advantage of that situation. Paul also pointed out that the Association of British Insurers had an attitude that made it difficult to take that into account, as it had a blank response to the issue. The Association of British Insurers blamed the legal profession for the high cost of the claims, but that has been rejected by the legal profession. Nevertheless, there is still a question mark about that.

We need to look at the claim culture and payments that are made for injuries in comparison to other areas. However, we must also take account of the fact that people who have genuine injuries

need to have the right of representation, and we should not tar everyone with the same brush.

However, as has been pointed out, Belfast and Derry are two areas that have been targeted, and the insurance companies' postcode lottery has labelled people.

11.45 am

Mr Lunn: The postcode lottery issue has been mentioned a great deal during the debate. Does the Member accept that those insurance companies that operate a postcode rating system in Northern Ireland operate exactly the same system in all other areas of the UK?

Mr Molloy: I accept that those companies probably use a postcode lottery, but the problem is that the information that they use here may not be as accurate as it is in other areas. Postcodes will be used in various ways. We see from watching our television screens each night that road accidents, joyriding and other incidents occur across the country, not only in west Belfast or Derry. The insurance companies do not seem to take full account of that across the different jurisdictions.

I want to touch on some of the questions that Members raised. Jonathan Craig supported the motion and questioned the difference in charges for car insurance. He also pointed out that only four insurance companies offer full insurance cover here, and he suggested that as a reason for the difference in charges.

Those who claim that we all come under the same jurisdiction should question that point more strongly than I have, because they expect that we should all be treated equally. Some have said that we are as British as Finchley, yet we pay different prices for car insurance from people in Finchley.

Mr McElduff: Is the Member talking about people such as Maurice Morrow?

Mr Molloy: I was not referring to anyone in particular. I must also point out that I will not be given an extra minute for each intervention. *[Laughter.]*

Jimmy Spratt made an important intervention on the PSNI's role in following up on accidents and investigating those who abuse the system. We want to root out people who abuse the system, because their actions mean that everyone else

must pay more. The support of the PSNI in that area is extremely important.

Leslie Cree agreed that the cost of car insurance is higher here than in other jurisdictions, or, as he put it, the other parts of the UK, and questioned why that should be the case. People should question why that differential exists and why people here pay more for their car insurance.

John Dallat touched on some of the issues that come into play. He pointed out that there are questions to be asked about the structures of insurance companies and how they come up with charges.

There may also be questions about the role that insurance companies played in the past, particularly given the pressure that they put on Quinn Insurance over the years. Indeed, the Association of British Insurers tried to block Quinn Insurance from entering the market at an early stage, and later it created further opposition and blockages. The insurance companies act as a cartel. Quinn Insurance was outside that cartel and was blacklisted by a number of them. Eventually, the insurance companies got their man and tried to put Quinn Insurance out of business.

Although Trevor Lunn declared an interest, he gave a fierce defence of insurance brokers and rubbished almost everything else that other Members said.

Mr B McCrea: I listened intently to what the Member said. Will he clarify whether the Irish regulator put Quinn Insurance out of business?

Mr Molloy: I was talking about two separate occasions. Had the Member been in the Chamber during the earlier part of the debate, he would have heard about the difference between them. The first blockage was put in place by the Association of British Insurers — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Molloy: After that blockage, the Irish regulator put Quinn Insurance out of business. The Member missed the earlier discussion.

Lord Morrow questioned the jurisdictions, and it is always difficult to establish the extent of a jurisdiction. However, he pointed out that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Molloy: Yes, we do not want any disruptions in the Chamber today. *[Laughter.]*

Maurice Morrow pointed out that Quinn Insurance provided a lifeline to many young people from various interest groups by offering them a good service and cheaper insurance. In particular, he pointed to those people who live in rural areas and people from different sections of society who have been victimised.

Martina Anderson praised the work of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's inquiry. She also praised the Consumer Council for its regular work and, particularly, for the work that it put forward in its report, which raised the issue. Although there are some question marks over the report, it is all part of the ongoing process, and the Consumer Council has been good at raising many of those issues.

Jim Shannon supported the motion, and although I cannot quote his accent, he said that the yung fouk on the Peninsula were paying more to insure a wee Corsa. It was important that we heard that in the debate.

Roy Beggs said that people should shop around, and that message should be sent out across the board. Declan O'Loan supported the motion strongly, and he welcomed the inquiry by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, particularly the work of Mitchel McLaughlin. Jonathan Bell said that low income households are paying expensive prices for insurance, and he talked about the issues that that affects. Gerry McHugh said that people feel abused by insurance companies, and that has been highlighted across the board.

We need to remember that we should not put ourselves down. That is a danger in the debate when highlighting the issues around the insurance industry, including abuse. We do not need to put ourselves down but we do need to create opportunities. Television programmes show the damage that is done across the different jurisdictions. In every jurisdiction, there are issues and abusers and people who take advantage of situations and accidents. We need to root that out so that everyone else does not have to pay dearly for insurance cover.

We need to highlight the need to challenge the insurance companies and the insurance

industry to reduce rates and to revise the situation to deal with the new mode here. Quinn supported ordinary people and gave them a lifeline and support. Unfortunately, he has been knocked out by the cartel in different ways. We need to find ways of ensuring that Quinn Insurance not only deals with things properly but that the company is given the proper support that it needs for the future so that it can provide competition. Young people pay much more than they should because they are labelled, and they are given no encouragement to be good drivers and to come into the system.

Mr Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Molloy: Rural dwellers, in particular, are suffering. Some companies that offer special rates are, in fact, charging more. The debate is important, and, hopefully, Members from across the Chamber will support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern about the higher premiums that drivers have to pay for car insurance in comparison to drivers in other jurisdictions; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to hold discussions with representatives of the insurance industry with a view to having insurance premiums brought into line with those in other jurisdictions.

Convergence Delivery Plan

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. 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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr B McCrea: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the uncertainty surrounding the Minister of Education's convergence delivery plan and the impact this is having on staff morale across the education sector; and calls on the Minister to update the Assembly on progress made to date.

Education is not a sectarian issue. The issue does not belong solely to one community, to one party or, dare I say, to one Minister. It affects our entire community. When we debate this important issue today, we should all be mindful of the questions that a group of young people, who might be sitting in the Gallery, might ask of us. Young people might ask: what can you do for me? What good can you do in the debate? How can you move things forward? Those are the questions that all of us, in conducting this debate, should bear in mind.

The Minister of Education has attempted to do one of the most challenging of tasks. She is attempting to bring a wide variety of organisations together into one whole organisation while fundamentally changing the functionality of that organisation. I do not know whether she realises how big a risk she is taking. Common sense dictates that it would be better to tackle them in sequence. It would be better to bring the organisations together and bed down organisational issues such as personnel matters and ways of doing things. When that has been established, she could start to change the functionality and see how things might be improved.

The purpose of the motion is to urge the Minister of Education to change direction. Rather than try to do everything in one pell-mell assault on the education system, could she find a way to do it in steps? It need not take long. Would it not be better to ensure that the

organisations are brought together, and then decide what to do with them?

In my opinion, the Minister of Education needs to concentrate on getting the essentials right. In a debate on the nature of education, it is important that the views of all stakeholders are taken in order to get them involved. In that regard, the Minister of Education has failed. Many people who are stakeholders in this part of our community feel excluded and that their views are not being heard by the Minister of Education. That is not the right way to go forward. If the Minister is going to make the types of changes that she wishes to make, it is essential that everybody is on board, has their say and has their concerns addressed. To be frank, Minister, that has not happened.

I have a suggestion as to how we could get some breathing space. The Minister needs to accept the existing statutory bodies that are enshrined in legislation, and she needs to work with those bodies and to let them do the work that they are supposed to do. She should respect their autonomy. Yesterday, she talked to me about another case and said that there is a reason why there is a difference between the Department of Education (DE) and the boards. She should respect that autonomy in all aspects, and she should stop attempting to micromanage every single aspect of the education system. One might ask how she is trying to micromanage. She is introducing artificial structures that do not have the command of legislation and that cloud the issue as to who is or is not responsible for various areas. We have a situation in which there are chief executive designates and chief executives to be appointed later. At the same time, there are chief executives in post, some of whom are on temporary extensions. It is a complete muddle and fuddle that is guaranteed to turn a very challenging attempt into some form of chaos.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education

(Mr Storey): Does the Member accept that it is not only mismanagement on the part of the Minister, but it is a financial scandal that the implementation body for the education and skills authority (ESA) has cost in excess of £8 million but has not delivered one item of benefit to front line services in education?

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Chairman of the Education Committee for his intervention. I will

be dealing with the financial issues later, but his point is well made.

My next point on this important issue is that it is incumbent upon the Minister to attempt to build confidence. It may well be that she is misunderstood or that other people have different ideas, but she cannot escape the fact that morale in our schools is deteriorating and that confidence in the wider community about our ability to manage the education system is failing. She must tackle those issues.

Local school principals tell me that although they feel comfortable about dealing with their own school issues, advice or guidance is not forthcoming from the education and library boards or the Department, when they ask for it.

How can it be, when people do not know where we are going? If we are to manage change, that issue must be addressed.

12.00 noon

Mervyn Storey mentioned finance. The Minister, taking a somewhat reckless position, vouchsafed that there would be £13 million of savings without in any way examining how those savings could be delivered in reality. The impact of that decision will be that our schoolchildren and the schools themselves will pay dearly. We will lose front line services because of the Minister's inability to deliver the savings that she has already committed to.

I referred to the children and those looking on at the debate. If there is one issue that defines the Assembly's failure to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland, it is education. I do not know what the Minister plans to do next. I know that she does not work well with the Committee for Education. I know that, whenever we try to talk reasonably and sensibly to her, we get laughter and grimacing and are told that, "We will do it one way and only one way, and that is our way". Minister, that is not the right way forward.

We have had debates in the past. Colleagues will note that I have not mentioned the position that we, as a party, took when we discussed the ESA Bills, because it is not constructive to do so. We are being positive. We are where we are, but, Minister, we are in chaos. The ability of the education system to —

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to refer his remarks through the Chair.

Mr B McCrea: Absolutely, Mr Speaker. The whole House must contend with an extremely serious situation. There is a deep feeling of discontent in the education system, in the wider community and among the electorate of Northern Ireland because our education system is not working. The people who are charged with administering that system have no idea where their jobs will be, whether they are required to stay on in their role or what functions they will have. All those issues bring us to the point at which the system cannot run effectively.

All of us must share a sense of responsibility in this matter. As a party, we are quite prepared to move forward with a works programme that finds some way of streamlining the education system and making savings where there is duplication in computer or payroll systems and so on. We are prepared to work with all parties in the Assembly to do what is right for our children. What we cannot do is carry on in this fashion. We cannot force one particular view through, because the people will not accept it.

Mr Speaker, I am grateful for your direction on this matter. However, it is with a genuine intent that, through you, I implore the Minister of Education to change direction, to listen to what people are saying, to do the right thing for the people of Northern Ireland and, above all, when she thinks of the children who might be looking down from the Public Gallery at what we are doing, to do the right thing for our children.

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

"and lack of transparency surrounding the Minister of Education's convergence delivery plan and the impact this is having on staff morale across the education sector; further notes the unacceptable failure to properly reconstitute the education and library boards within a reasonable time frame, which is contributing to a democratic deficit; and calls on the Minister to update the Assembly on progress made to date."

I thank the Members who tabled the motion for bringing the matter before the House and for accepting our amendment.

All of us are under no illusions as to why we are discussing this issue today. Once again, it stems from the Minister's failure to seek consensus and to address the real concerns about parity of esteem and equality. A clear pattern is emerging. In some attempt to

bypass real political engagement, Members are presented with plans at an unreasonably late stage, presumably to stifle debate and so that those plans can be presented as a fait accompli. It should seem apparent that such an approach does not wash with Members, as Basil McCrea noted.

I take this opportunity, as it is relevant to where we are today, to outline some of my party's concerns about the Education Bill, but I wish to make it clear that this is not an exhaustive list. Although we have concerns, we are supportive of making efficiency savings, which is why we supported the principles of the Bill when they were voted on by the Assembly.

Far from being a body that could oversee administration and play an even hand in rationalisation, what was proposed in the Education Bill was riddled with flaws and inconsistencies, leaving the proposed ESA in danger of a severe conflict of interest. It is evident that, in its current form, the Education Bill would have effectively created a lopsided education system that would have adversely affected the controlled sector. There is no reason why the sector should have become the poor partner in what would have been the biggest shake-up in the administration of education for 40 years.

The most startling inequality that stood out in the Bill was the issue of ownership. It is true that the Protestant Churches transferred ownership of their schools many years ago and the Roman Catholic Church continued with ownership of its schools. However, it was proposed that one of the ESA's roles was to rationalise the school estate under area-based planning, yet, to all intents and purposes, the ESA would be the ownership body for the controlled sector only. That posed a tremendous conflict of interest.

The Department of Education proposed a holding body under the second Bill, but that was next to useless. The holding body would have had no powers and a minor consultation role, and it would not have received any of the funds from the sale of any part of the controlled sector for the benefit of the controlled sector. If we compare that with other sectors, such as the maintained school sector, we can see that, under the Bill, the ownership body — the trustees — would have had the power to be consulted on almost every aspect of the running

of their schools, including the appointment of governors and the submission of management and employment schemes. In the controlled sector, individual boards of governors would have been responsible for the submission of management and employment schemes. In effect, there would have been a strong, unified maintained sector with a robust advocacy voice, compared with a disparate and leaderless controlled sector.

The treatment of the transferors was also apparent. They are the representatives of the Protestant Churches who gifted their schools to the state. However, they did not give that estate away unconditionally. They retained certain rights, including the right to sit on boards of governors, education and library boards and teacher appointment committees. Under the Education Bill, the transferors could not be guaranteed the right to sit on any holding body created by local statute or the ESA board because of section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Therefore, we would have had a diminution of rights enjoyed by the Protestant Church representatives over controlled sector schools where the majority of Protestant children are taught.

We have always made it clear that the ESA board should reflect the community in Northern Ireland. That also means that councillors who are appointed to the board reflect the electoral will of the people of Northern Ireland. If that were the case for any ESA board, it should also be the case for the boards under any convergence plan. The DUP does not seek to give one sector an advantage over any other but wishes to see equality across the sectors. The overriding principle needs to be parity of esteem.

The Minister has been aware of those concerns and others for some time, yet we have been faced with continued prevarication on addressing those concerns and on what should occur in the interim. The Minister has compounded the current problems by failing to start to consult early enough on formulating a plan B and by still failing to work with the Education Committee. Furthermore, until recently, the marginalisation of existing education and library board chief executives was short-sighted and counterproductive, given the critical importance of the accounting officers from the boards and other organisations buying into the convergence agenda. Perhaps that was a product of the premature recruitment of the directors-designate, who were in place and had

to be given something to do. Some 18 months ago, I warned about putting the cart before the legislative horse, but the Minister chose to press ahead regardless.

My party wants to see good governance and accountability arrangements underpinning all this, but we remain to be convinced of the legality, practicality, transparency and sustainability of the current proposals. We have made it clear that we are prepared to work with the Minister and her officials in finding the best way forward. In the meantime, however, it is imperative that education staff are kept as informed as possible. I am concerned that that has not been the case. On 11 March, I issued a statement calling on the Minister and her Department to give greater priority to communicating with education staff. Our young people are well served by thousands of motivated, professional staff who have shown that they are prepared to embrace change in the name of progress, but they must be treated with respect and every effort made to ensure that their morale is not unnecessarily eroded.

Uncertainty is not ideal. It is compounded by a failure to recognise that people who work in the sector should be kept fully informed of proposals that would impact on them and the services that they provide. Over two months ago, that point was raised with the Minister's officials at the Committee for Education. I welcomed the assurances that we received that the matter would be given proper priority. However, I have been shocked to discover that, rather than the Minister making more effort in that area, there has been no direct communication whatsoever between the Department and education staff during the intervening period. That woeful failure to keep staff informed is unacceptable. There is little wonder that the motion mentions uncertainty and the effect that it is having on staff morale.

A major concern is the Minister's lack of respect for the wider democratic process in rejecting the will of councils in nominating members to serve on the reconstituted education boards. Of course, I refer only to four boards; the South Eastern Education and Library Board will have no members at all for the foreseeable future thanks to the Minister's stubborn insistence on retaining her hand-picked and costly commissioners. In respect of the other four boards, it is bad enough that the Minister should seek to second-guess councils'

democratic choice by demanding more nominations than there are places, thus giving her the dubious right to pick and choose. It is provocative and insulting that, in some cases, she should tell councils that none of their choices is acceptable and demand more names. Not every council can find a multitude of members who are willing and available to serve on the reconstituted boards, especially in the light of the greater burden on members that is envisioned under the convergence delivery plan, which features regionalised committees and so forth. Yet, ironically, the Minister accuses councils of failing to co-operate when she attempts — in Mr Basil McCrea's words — to micromanage the process. The undue delay in appointing political members has caused concern about a clear democratic deficit on boards.

Convergence is a suboptimal solution. It is clear that an alternative way forward is required and needs to be agreed as soon as possible. It seems logical that a possible way forward is a phased approach that focuses on the five-board structure. Essentially, that could be facilitated through two phases. Phase one could be to amend the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to facilitate a one-board structure. That would mean that all existing rights would be protected, it would focus on the bodies that could achieve major savings and it would provide an effective governance and accountability framework for future change. The second phase would involve seeking agreement on further work that is required to protect sector rights in the new framework, which would create parity of esteem through those sectors.

The Minister tried to foist the ESA on us. When she realised that that was not going to work, she and her Department cobbled together a convergence plan that is clearly unworkable. The Minister needs to realise that she must sit down with the Committee for Education, other parties in the Assembly and key sectoral organisations to draw up acceptable and workable proposals. Plan A did not work. Plan B does not work. Perhaps, it will be third time lucky for the Education Minister. I hope that, finally, she has learnt her lesson.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I note that the proposer of the motion has left the Chamber, which shows how much interest he has in the information that it seeks.

The recent independent review of economic policy provides a timely reminder of the critical importance of ensuring that a workforce is built that has the skills that can attract and impress potential external investors, as well as those required to grow local entrepreneurs and successful, competitive local businesses. The fact is that economic prospects depend on the quality of the education system. Although there is evidence of modest improvement in attainment throughout schools, the Assembly must continue to drive the raising standards agenda. We know from outcomes that are delivered in some schools that many young people have the potential to achieve at a much higher level. We have a duty to plan and deliver the education system in such a way that it allows them to reach their full potential. The introduction of the ESA and its relevant legislation was the way to do that.

The merits of the ESA were well rehearsed in the House and in the Committee for Education. In fact, the ESA's merits were well acknowledged at Executive level, when all parties in the House signed up to the Programme for Government. The benefits of streamlining the way in which the education system works when it comes to transport, catering, personnel functions and so forth, must not be underestimated. The other parties in the House have failed to live up to the commitment in the Programme for Government or to provide any suitable alternative. Therefore, we are now working our way through a convergence plan that will facilitate the best use of public money and remove the duplication of services.

12.15 pm

We are aware that convergence will not deliver the full range of benefits and cost savings that could be possible under ESA, but it allows the momentum of improvement to continue. It will take time to make the changes work in the existing organisations, but the process will deliver the savings, amounting to £13 million in the 2010-11 financial year, that had originally been taken out of the education budget.

The focus is on ensuring that the £13 million of savings must be achieved from management and administration costs and that front line services for children and young people are protected. The Minister of Education has given that commitment time and time again, but Basil McCrea must have missed that. Perhaps he could drive home that same commitment to

his party colleague the Health Minister, who is unable to deliver the same for Health Service staff and services.

The motion refers to staff morale, and I fully accept that change is difficult for staff in any organisation. I acknowledge that the affected staff need clear and definitive guidance on the way forward. I look forward to the business plan being brought to the table to provide that clarity and enable us to move forward. Perhaps the Minister will shed some light on the position of that business plan.

We must be realistic about whether Members are committed to improving the outcomes for children. Some Members seem to be holding on tight to the education and library boards as they stand, and I remind them of the PAC report on literacy and numeracy that was published in 2006. Importantly, it pointed out that, although the Department had an effective strategy to improve standards in numeracy and literacy, the failure to deliver was the direct result of the fact that five education and library boards were not consistent in implementing it. That system of governance is failing children —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

Will the Member accept that, if we are to move forward to new structures, it is vital that one group of educational providers must not be isolated and discriminated against? In the words of the Minister from the Member's party, we must ensure the equality of provision across the board.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. There is absolutely no argument about that. The Minister has consistently stated that she wants equality of provision. The current system of governance is failing children, and we must drive home the need to change it. I am at a loss as to what other lessons Members must learn to enable them to take forward that change.

Although I support the motion because I accept that staff want clarity, I do not recognise the rest of the wording of the motion, because it is more about grandstanding than anything else.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion because I am aware of great concern about the present state of education administration. That concern

permeates not only the education and library boards but the education providers. Indeed, it has seeped down into our schools.

We are here today to debate the Minister's convergence plan. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence that board members have yet received that plan. It seems that the education and library boards are not yet committed to or aware of any time frame for convergence. In the absence of a convergence plan, they are planning their budget programmes for 2010-11.

Many questions about the convergence plan remain unanswered. What consultation processes will have to be conducted and by whom? Who will be consulted, and what will be the time frame? Will the convergence process be subject to an equality impact assessment, particularly in light of its proceeding in the absence of political representation on the current boards?

Many staff in the education and library boards have now given up on the ESA and are, at best, sceptical about convergence. The education and library boards are supposed to have council representation, but they have not had that since December 2009. Councillors have been going through a recruitment process for the past few months, and that is still not complete. We hear that the Department now proposes to bring in the new boards before that process is even finished. Clarification is required about whether that approach is even lawful.

It is clear that the legislation provides no role for the Minister in the selection of council representation, but the Minister seeks to give herself a role. The 1986 Order states that councils select and nominate members to sit on the education and library boards. Many board members believe that that is a ploy to keep councillors out of the process and that the current selection process is aimed more at appointing nodding heads who will agree with the Minister than reflecting the will of the councils. The delay in appointments will mean that councillors will have discussed neither the budget nor the convergence plan and will have no role in the agreement of those crucial issues.

The failure to secure the ESA Bill means that the current legislation is the only legal framework. That legal situation limits the ability of the education and library boards and other organisations to deliver convergence, because

their prime statutory responsibilities include the management of the budgets allocated to them by the Department to deliver services in their area. The boards are trying to meet their responsibilities with a much-reduced membership. That requires members to work long hours to do the work previously done by a number of committees.

Although, from a legal perspective, it is within the head of the service's purview to alter the number of members sitting on the education and library boards, those organisations are now operating with a much-reduced capacity of only six to eight members. The new boards will have only 12-plus members, including councillors. As I said, serious questions arise. Will the education and library boards still have responsibility and accountability for all the services that they currently deliver? Has a detailed risk assessment been carried out on the convergence plan, and, if so, who carried it out? Will the boards have the power to make decisions about issues for which they are responsible? Those are important questions.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

I take the Member's point about legality. We discovered from a letter that the Department of Education sent to the Committee for Education last week that the Department did not consider it necessary to seek specific legal advice about the process being used. The Department did not think that it was necessary to determine whether the process in which it is engaged is within the law, because it has all the information that it needs and is above the law. Members on this side of the House question the legality of what has been done, in the interim, to the traditional board arrangements.

Mr Speaker: The Member has about six minutes in which to finish.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Do I have a further six minutes?

I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with him. If the convergence plan that the Minister proposed is open to a legal challenge, what will be the outcome of that?

We have been told that convergence will save some £13 million through a reduction of the boards' workforce by between 200 and 300 posts. One official told us that the general —

Mr Speaker: I must insist: the Member's time is up.

Mr D Bradley: I will be brief. The general model is one of —

Mr Speaker: I must insist: the Member's time is up.

Mr D Bradley: OK. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Speaker: I continually say to Members that they should look at the clock before they give way, particularly when they are coming close to the end of their allotted time and a Member's intervention has already eaten into that time. Members do not get an extra minute to speak if that time has already been taken up. I warn Members to think about that before they give way.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the amendment for the reasons that Dominic Bradley gave. There has been major concern among staff in schools and on the boards. There is absolutely no doubt that the continuing impasse on the way forward for our education system is having a detrimental effect on all teaching staff and, perhaps particularly, on administration personnel in the education boards, who must wonder what on earth is going on and whether they will still have a job in the future. They can hardly be blamed for being sceptical about even wanting a job in an education system that has been fought over in the way that it has by its political masters since the beginning of this Assembly.

The motion implies that that uncertainty is the fault of the convergence delivery plan, which is the Minister's latest attempt to bring a cost-saving structure to the system and to realise economies of scale, as envisaged by the ESA. I was interested to hear Michelle McIlveen give her party's support for the principles of the ESA. However, I cannot help but observe that it was principally her party that caused the ESA to stall and brought about the need for a convergence delivery plan. I almost expected Mr Storey to jump up there, but I will carry on.

There are concerns, which I do not share, that the convergence delivery plan is just the ESA without legislation and that it is some sort of back-door route to the ESA goal. Although that is probably correct, is it really a matter for concern? The plan has very worthy aims. It wants to ensure a standard policy approach across existing organisations, as well as

consistency of procedures and processes across the region in areas such as special educational needs statementing. It wants to create standard access and application arrangements, such as statementing and free school meals, and to ensure that consistent thresholds and pricing structures are adopted across the region. It wants common staffing arrangements, including the preparations for a single organisation. What is wrong with that? What is wrong with a plan that will produce one human resources unit, which will include one payroll unit, instead of the current 27?

Mr B McCrea: I do not know whether the Member was in the Chamber at the start of the debate. However, the argument put forward in the opening statements was that this is an ambitious, high-risk plan, the difficulty with which is that it is trying to do two things at once. It wants to bring organisations together and change their functions, and that is where the risk comes in. The argument was made that it would be better to do that in sequence: first, get the organisational structure right and, secondly, make changes. That is what we are trying to do. It is not that the aims of the plan are necessarily wrong; it is the methodology.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lunn: I was in the Chamber during Mr McCrea's speech, and I heard him bring up the issue of a step-by-step approach. However, that is not in the motion, so it is interesting that he brought that argument forward.

If people have a massive concern about the ESA and its fundamental objective of streamlining the system and producing a cost-efficient, fit-for-purpose administration to maximise the educational opportunities for our school population, it is OK to be concerned. However, I cannot and have never been able to understand why the ESA has not been fully discussed officially in the Chamber, given that the Executive dealt with it over two years ago. The Education Committee spent the best part of a year discussing the detail of the Bill. That was, apparently, time wasted because now, according to our DUP friends, the ESA is dead in the water. Therefore, we have the convergence delivery plan instead. Is the alternative to do nothing?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: In case there is any confusion, I will clarify for the Member the reasons why the ESA is not coming back. They are the same reasons that

were set out during the period in which the Committee did its work. The controlled sector was going to be left totally and absolutely isolated with none of the legislative requirements and protections that were conferred on it in 1947. I know that there is always an issue in Northern Ireland with our history. However, I will not sacrifice the controlled sector, which educates 95% of Protestant children, for some bureaucratic legislation that satisfies the control freakery of the Department.

12.30 pm

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for that intervention. Surely, the point is that the Executive should have discussed all that and brought it forward. The only opportunity that we have to mention potential problems, some of which I have sympathy with, as the Member knows, is during debates on private Members' motions. Those are usually on some other subject, but this issue gets brought into them.

The convergence plan now seems to be the only way forward. Here, I begin to join the proposers of the motion and the amendment in expressing concern about the way in which it is being brought forward. The delay in reforming the boards is, frankly, inexplicable. The suspicion was that the Minister was exceeding her legal authority, but I think that that has been resolved and that the Minister has the legal authority to do what is being done. However, if it was legally allowable to reform and to reconstruct the boards, why did the Minister not allow the existing membership to continue? What is the difference? We could have saved months of a continuing impasse. The convergence plan is supposed to be only a stopgap measure pending the introduction of the ESA.

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

Mr Lunn: The new arrangements are taking so long that they are adding to the problem that they were meant to resolve.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be Mervyn Storey.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

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

2.00 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey): There is, as always, a mad rush after lunch for Members to get back into the House. I wish to inform the House of the Committee's scrutiny to date of the convergence delivery plan.

Following the Minister of Education's statement to the House on 1 December 2009, setting out the transitional governance and management arrangements, the Committee called on the Minister to release a copy of the plan, and continued to call for that throughout January and February 2010, when the Committee scrutinised the education budget plans for 2010-11. The Committee eventually received the plan on 26 February, and we questioned senior departmental officials about it on three occasions, that is on 3 and 10 March and, more recently, on 12 May.

The question that still remains for the Committee, and, for that matter, the House, is whether the plan will deliver the substantial savings projected, and when any of those savings will be realised. The Committee was told by the Department of Education, time and time again, that the £13 million already removed from the education budget in 2010-11 under ESA efficiencies must be achieved through management and administration costs to protect services to children and young people. However, the Committee has scrutinised the 30 pages of the convergence delivery plan, and there are four points that I want to highlight and bring to the attention of the House.

First, phase one of the convergence concentrates on cost reductions in the five education and library boards only, and not on the other non-departmental public education bodies through the seven regionally managed services covering all education and library board areas. Secondly, the ESA plan was that some 460 posts would be removed, of which 310 were to go by the end of the 2010-11 financial year. The latest convergence paper from the Department, dated 11 May 2010, does not quantify the target for the number of posts to be saved in the budget period of 2010-11. It says:

"the numbers will inevitably be lower than if ESA were in operation",

and that it will “take time”. Therefore, there are questions still unresolved, and detail missing. If time permits, I will come back to that issue as a Member.

Thirdly, the paper refers to a draft convergence business plan for 2010-11, which is expected to be finalised by the end of May 2010. That will be followed by seven individual regional service delivery plans, with the first phase of savings through voluntary severance programmes. Fourthly, full statutory responsibility remains with the five education and library boards. Each board must formally approve each of the service delivery plans. Indeed, the Department of Education's 11 May paper emphasised the need for:

“joint-working, goodwill and co-operation between organisations”.

The trade unions and others:

“will be consulted on any proposals.”

I trust that that paints a realistic picture of the uncertainty surrounding the delivery of that plan and when the savings can actually be achieved. That is important, because the Minister of Education, in her 2010-11 budget statement on 21 April, announced a cut of 1.6% in the resources of the five education and library boards and a below inflation increase of 1.9% in the budgets for schools.

It is clear that efficiency savings must be made in 2010 to protect education front line services in the classroom. To date, however, the convergence plan falls well short of gaining our confidence.

We also have great difficulty with the fact that the five education and library boards have not been properly reconstituted and remain as transitional or interim boards. The boards, as set out in the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, require the correct representation from district councils. The 1986 Order details boards' statutory responsibilities —

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: As I said, boards must formally sign off the key service delivery elements of the convergence plan.

I trust that I have given an accurate reflection of the concerns that were expressed in the Committee for Education.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The reason why we have a convergence delivery plan is because we do not have ESA. I speak against the motion and the amendment because neither offers an alternative to ESA. Basil McCrea said — I am paraphrasing him — that when the Minister took the £13 million out of her budget, she should have had a plan B in place. However, the Minister did not take £13 million out of her budget. No Minister will say that he or she has £13 million spare, which they can do without.

As part of the efficiency savings that the entire Executive had to achieve, and through the efficiencies envisaged in the review of public administration across health, education, councils — we all know the story behind that — and other areas, each Department had to achieve savings. The Department of Education had to achieve savings of £13 million in the next financial year. In the absence of ESA, there was a duty on the Department of Education to bring forward an alternative, and it brought forward the convergence plan.

As the Chairperson said, the convergence plan was debated on three different occasions in the Committee for Education. The motion tabled by Basil McCrea and John McCallister:

“notes with concern the uncertainty surrounding the Minister of Education's convergence delivery plan”.

I am not surprised that at least one of those gentlemen is uncertain, because they have not attended an Education Committee meeting for as long as I can remember. If they want information about the convergence plan, they should attend Education Committee meetings. They would be surprised by how much information they can obtain by doing so. Sometimes, I complain about the length of time that it takes the Chairperson to quiz departmental officials, but, on those three different occasions, senior officials from the Department of Education were quizzed at length on the convergence plan.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: I do not wish to defend other Members' attendance at Committee meetings. That is an issue for them. However, the Western Education and Library Board, in its response to the Department's convergence delivery plan, acknowledged that it was doing so:

"without sight of a detailed CDP".

The Western Board had not been given all the information. Neither Members nor practitioners have had sight of that information.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr O'Dowd: The ongoing discussions with the education and library boards will outline the details of each convergence plan. A massive piece of work has been undertaken. The fact of the matter is that discussions are continuing with the boards about how the convergence plan is delivered. The boards realise that to achieve their goals for education delivery, there must be better working among them on education issues if their budgets are going to work.

I come back to the point about why we do not have ESA. ESA is an agreed programme of work of the Executive. It has been debated by the Committee for Education for nine months, during which we went through it verbatim. That is what a scrutiny Committee is there for. Its duty is to scrutinise the Bills that come before it. We had lengthy sessions with departmental officials and the various stakeholders, and we considered the ESA Bill from every angle. A number of amendments have been tabled, a significant number of which my party is prepared to accept. However, the Bill continues to be blocked, not by the Department of Education or Sinn Féin, but by the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party.

Again, we have a scenario that is similar to the motion and the amendment that are before us. No workable alternative to bringing ESA forward has yet been tabled.

No one can deny the role and history of the transferors in education. No one wants to move education forward at the cost of denying the transferors a future role. They have an ingrained knowledge of education that any society would benefit from. We cannot reverse what has happened. We cannot overturn a decision that was made more than 50 years ago. Miss McIlveen said that the transferors had:

"gifted their schools to the state."

At that stage, Protestant Churches handed their schools and grounds to the state. Unless the proposal is that the Executive should hand back tens of millions of pounds worth of property to the Churches, no one has yet come up with a workable alternative.

The Department of Education issued proposals to protect the role of the transferors in education through the board of governors and the holding body. Importantly, there is a controlled sector support body, funded and resourced by the state but allowed to develop under its own head of steam. That has never happened before. That body is there to ensure that the wide array of people who are involved in the controlled sector set a plan for that sector. Anyone who is seeking to retain the education and library boards has failed to recognise that, under the leadership of those boards, the controlled sector has lagged behind the most.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr O'Dowd: Unless we bring the controlled sector under the remit of ESA, and I believe that there is an opportunity to do that, we will fail everyone.

Mr Hilditch: I support the amendment. I welcome the opportunity to highlight some of the issues and concerns in the education sector and look forward to the Minister's update on progress to date. I hope that her update will reflect real progress that can help us to regain confidence in our once-renowned education sector. I hope that, in her response, the Minister does not use the cloak of financial pressures as an excuse, as the whole public sector is facing that problem. I hope that we can take a realistic and innovative approach to ensure adequate delivery of services.

The education sector, which involves some 50,000 people, is experiencing a lack of confidence, mistrust and uncertainty. Its Minister and Department seem to suffer from a constant changing of minds. That was reflected last week when the unacceptable situation endured by Whitehouse Primary School was, I hope, finally resolved, but not before a public outcry and comment from those within the education sector.

Members will be aware that I am fairly new to the Education Committee, having been appointed to it only a few weeks ago. However, I did not have to be a member of the Committee to be fully aware of the difficulties facing the sector. Like other Members, I receive many communications from parents, teachers, head teachers, administrators, unions and those holding management roles in the sector, and they consistently highlight the same areas of

concern that unite them in the fight to retain staff morale and public confidence.

The amendment refers to the unacceptable failure to properly reconstitute the education and library boards in a reasonable time frame — a situation that is contributing to democratic deficit. Here, again, we see uncertainty. There has been a severe reduction in representation from those who are elected to public office. Those people are publically accountable and give the boards the transparency that the public seek. That deficit gives credibility to the claims of a lack of public confidence, particularly when the convergence of services is going ahead, and the possibility of a convergence of responsibility remains unclear. We are aware of the thoughts of one senior figure in the education sector who seeks clarification on who will carry the can if something goes wrong.

We need local knowledge and input. If that does not come through local public representatives, the boards may become unrepresentative of the communities that they seek to serve. Although I support the amendment, I urge the Minister and her Department to ensure that the existing organisations continue to deliver key policies and that any convergence process is legal and transparent. That process relies on the recognition that it is better to pull together, rather than pull apart, in order to get the best outcome for the children whom we serve.

If devolution means anything — in this case, education — the political parties that occupy the House must talk matters through, Departments must consult, and Ministers must deliver. I support the amendment.

In case I stand accused for leaving the Chamber, I put on record that I should have been at a meeting of the Committee for Social Development that began at 2.00 pm. I may have to leave the Chamber to make a quorum.

2.15 pm

Mr Beggs: I also support the motion and the amendment. I am deeply concerned about how we have reached the situation in which we find ourselves. The Minister of Education has failed to progress democratically the first of two Education Bills that would have created an education and skills authority in Northern Ireland. However, millions of pounds have been squandered in the attempted establishment

of that authority by employing staff, and so on, before it actually exists.

In the absence of democratically agreed legislation, the Minister is attempting to introduce her proposals through the back door and in a democratic vacuum. That is simply not acceptable, but we need not have got ourselves into this situation. I remind Members that the Ulster Unionist Party pointed out many of those issues at Second Stage of the Education Bill. All other parties supported that Bill. Indeed, Edwin Poots stated in the Second Stage debate:

"I do not have a great deal of affection for the multiplicity and tiers in the current system, in which five boards and numerous other bodies oversee education. Different boards have different standards and priorities, which means that there is not the consistency that there should be across Northern Ireland. We broadly welcome the Bill and the opportunity to examine the legislation". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 36, p19, col 1].

The DUP now opposes the education and skills authority, but it missed the opportunity to stop the entire flawed process in its tracks in those early days. That was a mistake that allowed the deeply flawed Bill to reach Committee Stage and encouraged the Minister to start her deeply flawed process of transformation in the education system. The education system now finds itself in the no-man's-land of a convergence delivery plan.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: No, I want to get through my speech. Thank you.

As other Members indicated, staff morale has been affected. Some £8 million has been wasted on ESA, and it is one of the main failings in education. I recognise the fact that educational reform is particularly sensitive because it affects our schools, children and local communities. However, it is not the only area in the review of public administration that is failing badly. It is a similar situation with local government, where some £9 million has been squandered. As in education, there is a lack of direction and low staff morale in local government. It has also incurred additional costs, and efforts have been wasted. Therefore, we are not making the best use of our limited resources.

As my colleague stated, there is now no legal basis underpinning the Minister's convergence delivery plan. It will work only with considerable

levels of goodwill and collaborative working across all existing organisations. Collaborative working is not a strength that the Minister has shown in the past. That is an obvious concern if that is how we hope to get through the difficulties, but I hope that that will be possible. For the sake of our children, it is important that we move forward. I hope that the Minister will listen to what others are saying.

Is the Minister content that the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 will provide adequate legal protection for boards if the arrangements are made permanent? That is a key question that needs to be answered. What role does the Minister envisage ESA-designated personnel playing? The money spent on the costs involved could have been spent usefully on many other valuable services.

There is concern that the Minister is attempting to reconstitute the boards in her own image by refusing to appoint councillors and restricting councillors who may have probed and questioned in the past. Many councillors have proven records of service in education and library boards. I declare that my dad was a member for 30-odd years, but my comments are not made with reference to him.

What response has the Minister to accusations of a democratic deficit in the process? Can she give us a time frame for the reconstitution of the boards? When will the present educational void be filled? Until the Minister answers those questions, uncertainty will prevail over the entire process.

Mrs M Bradley: My colleague Dominic Bradley has already covered many of my concerns, and it is probably futile to reiterate the same points. Therefore I will keep my remarks short, but perhaps not so sweet.

Education has become a game of political tennis. Even though the Minister was proficient in the sport of tennis, it is unfortunate that we cannot say the same for her management of the education system.

I am sure that since the education debacle began, many Members have parents and teachers bringing issues to their constituency offices; yet we find that we cannot give definitive answers to settle their concerns. I am beginning to think that we will never see a conclusion to the Minister's overhaul of the education system.

The SDLP has concerns about the convergence delivery plan. Under the plan, no individual director is responsible to the Department, and that raises issues about who is accountable for mistakes that could occur under the interim arrangements. Only transferors, trustees and teachers are members of the boards. Elected representatives are absent. That raises further concerns about accountability for staff under the new plans

The convergence delivery plan suggests that savings of up to £13 million can be achieved through a streamlining of services, which largely means reducing the headcount. That has a significant impact for a number of reasons. First, if expertise is lost through severance, where will we get the necessary expertise for the new boards? Secondly, it is estimated that if ESA had gone according to the timetable, approximately 300 posts could have gone next year. Under the convergence plan, it is suggested that a couple of hundred posts might go. Since that decision has a serious impact on staff morale and confidence, questions must be asked. Given the loss of expertise that will result from the removal of up to 200 posts, how will the service that schools require be maintained? Procedures must be put in place to ensure that the departure of senior staff does not weaken the convergence process.

I would like clarification on the following: can the boards' teacher appointment committees operate without the presence of elected representatives? Their presence is part of the boards' constitution. That reflects the uncertainty about the convergence plan, and it needs to be addressed by the Department.

I urge the Minister to inform the House about the process of the plan and, furthermore, to tell Members what is being done to allay the genuine fears of staff. Staff should not have to do a day's work while worrying about their jobs. I ask that the Minister give them some confidence.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Go raibh maith agat as iarraidh orm labhairt sa díospóireacht seo, nó tá na saincheistanna a ndéanfar trácht orthu inniu an-tábhachtach.

The issues that have been touched on in the debate are significant. We have heard a great deal about efficiencies, standards and pupil

outcomes. We have heard earnest concerns about the potential loss of locally sensitive services and the vulnerability of staff who work across the education sector. In the amendment, we read about transparency, failures and the democratic deficit.

Ba mhaith liom déileáil leis na saincheistean seo agus a leagan amach go soiléir an dóigh a bhfuil mise, agus mo chuid feidhmeannach sa Roinn — atá ag obair go dlúth le comhghleacaithe sna heagraíochtaí oideachais ar fad — ag dul i ngleic leis na dúshláin atá romhainn.

I want to deal with those issues and to set out in unambiguous terms the clear way in which my officials and I are working closely with colleagues in all the education bodies and how we are tackling the challenges that lie ahead of us.

However, this debate is not about concern. It is about banging a drum and grandstanding, so I will not be dragged into the tedium of the narrow self-interest of those who tabled the motion. Instead, I will address the concerns of parents and pupils. I will explain why convergence is needed. I will repeat the importance of my main theme and how the policy of convergence contributes to that. My Department is focused on raising standards and securing equality for all.

I have spoken frequently about the need for change: change to put our children at the heart of education, and change to tackle the scandal that even though some elements of our system are world class, almost 4,500 children leave primary school without the basic literacy and numeracy skills that they need and 11,000 young people left school without achieving five good GCSEs, including literacy and maths. The gap in achievement between our most disadvantaged and our most affluent pupils is far too wide. I have said it before and I will say it again: nobody on the Benches opposite, nobody from the parties that are blocking reform and the establishment of ESA would want their children to leave school without GCSEs in English and Maths or in Irish and Maths, depending on the language in which they study — nobody. So, Members should reflect on and think about that.

Alas, we are not making sufficient progress on raising the performance of pupils leaving school. My colleague John O'Dowd referred to the lagging behind that there is in the controlled sector, despite the best efforts of teachers. The current arrangements still provide us with

an outcome that leaves more than 40% of our school leavers without the basic qualifications that are required for employment. In non-selective schools, that figure is nearly 70%, and in those schools in Belfast, it is closer to 80%. That is shocking, and a shocking indictment.

Young people cannot progress beyond school into meaningful work or full-time training to enable them to develop their careers. That is unsustainable. We need change and we need it urgently. We cannot wait. We cannot wait while parties dither. We cannot wait while, year upon year, young people are failed in our education system. That should be of fundamental concern to us all in the House.

The Executive committed themselves to the creation of an education and skills authority in its Programme for Government. They agreed that it should have been established on 1 January 2010. For the past two years, my officials and I have been pressing hard for the implementation of that Executive policy, and I thank my officials for their work. ESA is ready to go. It has been ready for a long time.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: It is going nowhere.

The Minister of Education: It has been blocked by Members sitting opposite —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: Yes.

The Minister of Education: — who claim to care about underachievement and standards. They must ask themselves major questions.

In this House, Members ask whether we have a legal basis for ESA: of course we have. The Executive agreed that we need ESA in order to reduce bureaucracy, streamline administration and promote a single, common, optimal solution to tackling the twin evils of underachievement and inefficiency. The Executive need to deliver on their commitments, and we need to see the legislation back on the Floor of the Chamber. We need to implement that legislation and we need to create the statutory vehicle to deliver progress. Without that legislative change, we will not deliver on the progress that we must make on raising standards.

Members sitting opposite can go to working-class communities —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: We did. It is called an election.

The Minister of Education: — on the Shankill, in Coleraine, Derry and different parts of the North — to explain why they have failed to deal with underachievement.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members know that they should not speak from a sedentary position, so I remind them not to do so. The Minister has the —

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will refrain from attacking the Chair. The Minister has the Floor. If the Member wants the debate to continue, he should listen to the Minister's response.

2.30 pm

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. If those who proposed the amendment impress their views on their colleagues in the Executive, I would be happy to remove any uncertainty with the establishment of a strong statutory authority that incorporates locally elected representatives and steers a clear path to better educational outcomes. My first priority is and will continue to be to improve the life chances of young people. I will not sit idly by; I will continue to bring about the necessary arrangements to ensure that every young person gets a first-class education system.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: No, I will not.

Secondly, I have to address the financial realities of the Budget settlement. In simple terms, £13 million was removed from the education budget in anticipation of the ESA. We need to address such reductions. Mention was made of Roy Beggs Snr, and I put on record my appreciation of the role that he played. He attended every meeting of the chairpersons of the working group. He played a very important role in working on the establishment of the ESA, and he was clearly supportive of the need for its establishment. I applaud his leadership. I wish that some Members on the Benches opposite showed similar leadership.

The policy on convergence that we are following allows boards to maintain and, indeed, improve service delivery in a range of areas while reducing their costs. I am pleased that board members and staff have already expressed their willingness to work within a convergence framework to deliver the necessary changes. In school transport, catering and finance and personnel functions, there are opportunities to streamline the way in which we work and to reduce costs. That will mean fewer people working on those tasks, but I have to ensure that we live within budget. I am absolutely determined to do that while protecting front line services. I am working to ensure that we will enhance the resources available to classroom teachers. We cannot improve pupil performance by reducing the support that they need where they need it most.

I have further responsibilities to ensure the optimum use of public moneys. I have to ensure that the limited resources available to me are used to maximum effect. Convergence cannot deliver the full range of benefits and cost savings that should be possible under the RPA. Convergence, inevitably, can proceed only at a slower pace. Not least, that alternative needs the agreement, commitment and goodwill of all the existing organisations to progress. Inevitably, such dialogue means that it will take longer to deliver those changes than would otherwise have been the case. That dialogue is important if we are to establish the commitment and ownership that will be necessary to deliver the plan.

That new approach will mean the biggest changes in a generation to the administration of education. Under convergence, the development of a common approach heralds an opportunity to put into practice ideas that many board members have been discussing and promoting for many years. Increased coherence and improved efficiency of services will follow.

We anticipate that there will be substantial financial savings from those reforms, and we must start implementing those savings immediately. I will insist that they be channelled back into front line services. I want less spent on bureaucracy and more spent on teaching and learning. To achieve that, an initial draft business plan on how convergence will be delivered will issue soon. That plan will describe how service management can be reconfigured while protecting service delivery and reducing

the cost of managing it. Services can be delivered successfully throughout the North of Ireland.

Posts, many of which are currently vacant, can be suppressed. It is important that the revised structure is able to offer the assurances necessary for proper accountability and good governance. Some of the current deficiencies necessitate those changes to allow the boards to deliver on their obligations while securing cost reductions.

I appreciate the uncertainty and difficulties that the Executive's failure to bring forward ESA has created for staff, all of whom deserve praise for their efforts in continuing to deliver education services in those circumstances. In the absence of legislation to establish ESA, the statutory responsibilities ascribed to existing bodies remain their accountability for public resources and for the delivery of education services. I have moved to reconstitute the boards, and the proper structures are in place. That is precisely why we must make progress in fulfilling the Executive's commitment to creating a new authority that will better provide for pupils, staff and the whole community.

The delay in establishing ESA necessitated those interim arrangements, and what we do now is designed to bridge the gaps between where we are now and where we need to arrive. ESA's chief executive-designate, Gavin Boyd, has been asked to produce a convergence business plan for 2010-11 and to discuss it with the education partners. It is expected that the plan will begin immediately to define the prioritisation of services to be converged and the specific model to be used for each service area. It is envisaged that the design work will be led by the ESA directors-designate, but that implementation will be largely a matter for the boards. When implementation begins, the chief executive-designate, in conjunction with the boards, will produce the business cases to support voluntary severance and the creation of a smaller number of new management jobs throughout the North as the services converge.

Ní tráth é seo a bheith ag imirt chluiche na polaitíochta; is é an phríomh-thosaíocht é caighdeán a ardú agus torthaí daltaí a fheabhsú.

It is not a situation for political point scoring. The priority remains to raise standards and improve pupil outcomes. The optimum solution to administrative reform remains the delivery of

the RPA legislation. That legislation is needed to remove uncertainty, and, until it progresses, convergence is required to raise standards and reduce costs.

The motion asks for an update, but that is the up-to-date position. In common with those who tabled it, the motion is already out of date. Therefore, I call on those who tabled the motion to support the efforts of staff across the education sector to deliver improved outcomes and more efficient administration. I call on them and particularly on those who tabled the amendment to desist from alarmist conjecture.

I commend the work of those across the sector who seek to support young people and deliver an enhanced education service. Our children — the pupils in our schools — deserve no less.

Mr Ross: I thank the Ulster Unionist Members for tabling the motion and for accepting the amendment in my name and in the names of my colleagues, Miss McIlveen and Mr Hilditch.

True to form, Mr Beggs made an ill informed and not particularly helpful contribution. It would have been better had he said nothing, particularly given that the Minister was able to inform Members about the role that his father played in support of ESA. Second Stage legislation is about principles, and the DUP highlighted a number of its concerns about the ESA Bill.

In the past number of years, several debates about education matters have followed a similar theme. Members from all political parties and from across the country have raised concerns about the direction in which the Department was going, the Minister's ideas and being kept in the dark on many matters. Today's debate is no different, and, in fact, we have heard the same old stuff from Sinn Féin Members. They tell us that there is no need for panic or concern and that there is no public confusion or anger. They try to assure us that everything is OK.

Sinn Féin repeatedly uses another tactic. In this case, Michelle O'Neill, who is no longer in the Chamber, said that other political parties were grandstanding. Well, it is a grand coalition of grandstanders because, once again, the DUP, the Ulster Unionist Party, the Alliance Party and the SDLP — all the other parties — recognise that there is concern, confusion and anger in the community. That is not alarmist politics. It is not only Members and other politicians who

are saying that there is confusion and anger. If it were, perhaps Sinn Féin would have a point.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

Is that not confirmed by the attempt by the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, prior to the election to hide the issue and blame everybody except the Minister? That was a failed political stunt, because it did not help her in South Down. The organisations that the deputy First Minister attacked said that his was not a fair reflection of the position and that the Minister was responsible for causing the confusion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Ross: It is not new for Sinn Féin to blame everyone else and say that the problem lies with them. The problem lies with Sinn Féin. It is not just politicians in the Chamber who are pointing out the difficulties. We heard earlier in the debate that the Western Education and Library Board expressed concerns about what is happening. At its last meeting, the Education Committee was given an article from a local newspaper in which the North Eastern Education and Library Board's chief executive referred to the concerns that his board had on where things were going.

In his opening remarks, the Ulster Unionist Member for Lagan Valley Mr McCrea said that the Minister of Education does not work well with the Committee. I think that he would admit that that is an understatement. On each and every controversial issue, it seems as though the Minister deliberately puts herself at loggerheads not just with the Committee and other Members but with the public, whether with regard to Whitehouse Primary School, from which she had to back away after public pressure, or the prep school issue, which she had to back away from because of public pressure. I argue that the Minister needs to change her PR adviser.

There is also a lack of understanding from Sinn Féin of how the political processes in the Assembly work. Its attempts to get its way on everything continually fail. Sinn Féin thought that it would get its way on academic selection, but it did not. It thought that it would get its way on prep schools, but, after legal challenges, it did not. Sinn Féin needs to learn that the way to get legislation through the House is through seeking consensus and working with other parties.

The ESA has been raised on numerous occasions. Let us look at the situation. During the normal legislative process, a Bill is introduced, amendments are proposed and parts of the Bill are accepted and others rejected. The Minister's view is that we do it her way, or she will blame everyone else. That is not how laws are passed in any legislature. The Minister must work with the parties that she blames for blocking the ESA Bill. The Minister said that the DUP is blocking the Bill. The reality is that there is a reason why it is being blocked and, unless the Minister works with those who have difficulties and concerns, it is going absolutely nowhere.

Sinn Féin has not learned the lessons of the experience of the ESA when it comes to the convergence plan. We are talking about the convergence plan because of the lack of progress on the ESA. I have listened to other Members. Dominic Bradley said that there are concerns about the legality of what the Minister is doing, and we heard that she did not even seek legal opinion on the issue. That shows the arrogance of the Minister in thinking that she can get her own way on everything.

In proposing the amendment, Miss McIlveen said that Members had been given the plans at a late stage in an attempt to bypass the debate. That is an all-too-common approach by the Minister. Indeed, the Chairperson of the Committee commented on how it had been calling for the plan for many weeks before it got sight of it. I do not think that that is a good way to go about things. That leads to questions of legality and practicality, which, in turn, lead to confusion and lack of certainty. Those who will be affected by the proposed changes have not been told what is going on and do not know what is going on, as has been highlighted by Members across the Chamber.

We do not know the time frame, and the Minister did not clarify very much. We have not heard much more about political representation on the boards. We still have the commissioners in the South Eastern Education and Library Board, where there is no political input. Mr Lunn rightly asked why we should not just keep the councillors who were appointed to the board. Of course, the reason why they are not being kept is that the Minister would rather hand pick members so that she can interfere. That is the sort of control freakery that we are used to from her. I hope that the House will unite behind the motion and the amendment.

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

Mr Ross: We must look at a phased approach to a real way forward whereby we can see change on a step-by-step basis. I support the amendment and the motion.

2.45 pm

Mr McCallister: I am grateful for the support of colleagues across the divide, and I am happy to support the DUP amendment. I will respond to Mr Ross: we could have made more about the debate at the Second Stage of the Education Bill, but we stayed away from that. We have warned consistently of the dangers of the Bill, against which our Ministers voted in the Executive and on which we have taken a consistent approach.

The Minister's contribution contained all the usual, warm flannel that we have come to expect from her. She asked how anyone could not support the desire to raise standards in schools to help underprivileged children. I do not doubt for one instant the commitment of every Member, irrespective of their party, to addressing those issues. What did we get from the Minister other than that? Did we hear anything about convergence, the number of posts that are to be reduced or the budgets? All of that is still up in the air. Did we hear anything from the Minister on whether the ESA is dead in the water, as the Chairperson of the Committee for Education suggested? Is the convergence delivery plan permanent?

The only question to which she seems to think she knows the answer is whether, under the 1986 Order, it is legal to implement her convergence delivery plan, and she thinks that it is.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: The Minister did not say that that was legal, and she could not say that it was. In correspondence to the Education Committee dated 11 May, an official writing on her behalf made it clear that the Department did not seek legal opinion. It is only a matter of time before someone takes the issue to court and tests the legality of what the Minister has done.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful for that clarification. The Minister seems to think that her plan is based on joint working, goodwill and co-operation between organisations. If ever there was a Minister in any Government who

cannot claim to be taking part in joint working, goodwill and co-operation, it is this Minister. This Minister has no record of working with people and, as Mr Ross pointed out, she fails to recognise how the legislative Assembly works or how any type of legislature works.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to the fact that, although the Minister is present in the Chamber, she is nowhere near the debate. She is not even listening to it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. The Minister can decide to pay attention to what is happening, she can ignore what is happening or she can take account of what is being said. That is the Minister's prerogative.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to my colleague Mr Kennedy for that. That has been the problem with the education debate since the Minister came into office. Mr Kennedy is right: the Minister has been ignoring everyone except herself and a few people around her. She has ignored the debates on the transfer test and on special needs education, and, until she had to pay attention, she ignored the debates on Whitehouse Primary School and on preparatory schools. She has ignored the debates every time that someone has raised an issue, and she thinks that she knows better than everyone else.

The Minister misses the point of this legislature, and she misses the point about what scrutiny by a Committee is meant to provide. She thinks, somehow, that, if people do not agree with her 100%, they cannot possibly be right and that those people do not care about children or about education. That is all that we get from the Minister. She comes out with the same stuff in every over-rehearsed speech about how it is all about the children; it is practically the one speech each time. She does not answer any of the questions that Members ask during debates. She did not answer the quotation that David Hilditch suggested that Gordon Topping made:

"This is a recipe for some form of disaster. If something goes wrong, who is going to carry the can for it?"

We have no idea where that is. It is left in the ether in the hope that something will happen. The Minister will blame unionists, the SDLP, the Alliance Party or others because they do not agree with her. Everything is the fault of everyone except the Minister.

The Minister's role is to lead on education, bring people with her, build consensus on the way forward and tackle the issues that she talks about. She talks about underachievement, but what is she doing to address it? Where is the nought-to-six strategy? We have been promised it, but we have not seen it. Why is it that some of my constituents cannot get their children nursery places? We need to save money, but the Minister has no clue how we are going to do that. She has this convergence plan, but she does not know how many posts it will remove or how much money it will save. The ESA was supposed to save £13 million. She cannot continue with this without there being an effect on front line services. That brings us back to the question of why people cannot get nursery school places for their children. Why did we have a debate about getting £80,000 for the I CAN centre in Ballynahinch? The Minister does not have the money, because she cannot deliver on any of the policy agenda.

The Minister has failed every test that has been put in front of her since she became Minister. She has become an absolute disgrace and an example of how, perhaps, the Assembly and the Executive are not functional or fit for purpose. She is the symbol of that dysfunctionality and of the blockage that we need to get rid of to enable us to move things along in the Assembly. If we are not seen to make the Assembly work and if we cannot get a way forward on such issues as the ESA, transfer arrangements or other education needs, what hope do we have of raising standards in education? The Minister, who is not remotely interested in the debate, merely comes along and gives her own little speech and continues to ignore some Members.

Mr Kennedy: She is having a private conversation.

Mr McCallister: She continues her private conversation. That is her commitment to parents, children and teachers in our education system. That is how interested she is in the ESA.

Today, we had nothing on how long the officers-designate in the ESA will stay in post or on how long they will continue to be paid for from the public purse. Do we keep the organisation hanging in shadow form in the hope that, eventually, unionists, the SDLP, the Alliance Party or the majority of the House will suddenly accept her ESA Bill? Will we wait in anticipation for some turnaround in the mood?

It is rare for me to pay tribute to a Sinn Féin Minister, but the Education Minister should look at her colleague Minister Gildernew, who introduced the Forestry Bill. Certain sections were very controversial, and there were 40 to 50 amendments.

Mr A Maskey: *[Interruption.]*

Mr McCallister: If the Member wants to make an intervention, he can do so. I prefer him to do that than to comment from a sedentary position.

Mr A Maskey: I appreciate that the Member acknowledges the fine work and reputation of Minister Michelle Gildernew. However, it follows that his party should not have been conspiring with every other brand of political unionism, from English Tories to the TUV, to unseat Michelle Gildernew. Is that the same Minister you are talking about?

Mr McCallister: That is as relevant to a debate about the ESA as was Caitríona Ruane's speech. The point that I was making about Minister Gildernew was that she worked with her Committee and tried to find a way through. The Education Minister has ignored the Education Committee, the wishes of the Assembly, the public, the stakeholders and everyone else. The only people whom she may have listened to were the voters in South Down, but they told her that they did not want her as their MP. She has ignored people at every turn, and she does so at her peril. Our standards and budgetary contribution are falling behind —

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

Mr McCallister: The Minister is a disgrace. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 3.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes it ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the Question on the amendment will be put.

The debate stood suspended.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Translink: Auditory Information

1. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Translink pilot scheme on the provision of auditory information for blind and partially sighted users. (AQO 1255/10)

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): Last year, Translink submitted proposals to the Department to introduce an audio-visual pilot scheme. Following investigation, it was established that the proposals did not meet all the requirements expected of such a system. As a result, my Department is investigating other options, including the potential of extending the existing global positioning data systems on Translink Metro services to deliver audio-visual information to passengers. Discussions are progressing, and I hope that we will be able to introduce proposals for a pilot in the autumn.

My Department remains committed to the introduction of audio-visual equipment on buses and will continue to work with Translink and other partners, such as the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Council (IMTAC), to develop proposals that will best meet the needs of the travelling public. However, the introduction of any system will depend on the Department's securing the necessary resources.

Mr Savage: Translink representatives recently expressed concern that issues still remain unresolved over securing sufficient funding to carry out the pilot scheme. Will the Minister ensure that adequate funding for the scheme is available?

The Minister for Regional Development: As all Members will know, funding is an issue for every Department. Nonetheless, we are committed to developing the pilot scheme. The initial scheme, which Translink proposed, did not meet all the requirements, but we are working on a scheme that may have a better chance of doing so, and the intention is to launch the pilot scheme in the autumn.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his reply. The Minister has been very good at meeting a range of disability groups, but will he give us an update on the Department's disability action plan, how it is progressing, and a date for its publication?

The Minister for Regional Development: I do not have the date for publication to hand, but I will ensure that we correspond with the Member and give him that information. Suffice it to say that we have been working diligently with groups such as IMTAC and others, which give us advice on public transport accessibility. Improvements have occurred over the years, and the number of people suffering from a range of mobility issues who have been able to make use of public transport has been increasing year on year. As I said, I will endeavour to find out the date for publication, and I will correspond with the Member.

Cross-border Public Transport

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department has taken to encourage people to use public transport on a cross-border basis, including any ticket price incentives and reductions in fares. (AQO 1256/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I liaise regularly with my counterparts in the South on cross-border public transport issues. The discussions cover the full policy spectrum, including cross-border rail, concessionary fares, rural community transport and sustainability issues. Since the reopening of the viaduct in Malahide in November 2009, NIR (Northern Ireland Railways), in co-operation with Iarnród Éireann, has offered a series of discounted fares for cross-border rail travellers. The range of discounts has operated successfully for some months now and has helped to restore passenger numbers. There are no plans to increase Enterprise fares generally in the near future, and Translink promotes the discounted fares on its website, at stations and through outdoor advertising.

Translink is also promoting cross-border rail fares through joint promotions with third-party partners in Dublin. In addition, cross-border bus and rail travellers can avail themselves of the various concessionary fares schemes that my Department funds. The all-Ireland free travel scheme allows free travel for pass holders aged 66 and older from the South to travel

free of charge on all bus and rail services in the North using the SmartPass card. Similarly, Senior SmartPass holders in the North aged 65 and over are entitled to travel for free on participating public transport services throughout Ireland, North and South, using their Senior SmartPass.

Cross-border ticketing arrangements are under discussion with the relevant agencies in the North and the South, with a view to establishing an integrated ticketing function. In the meantime, a full range of cross-border tickets can be bought at the counter and on buses for a wide range of destinations, including an interlink service, such as the number 270 Belfast to Galway service. Moreover, an Irish Rovers ticket is available for travel on all bus services in Ireland. Those tickets are not available online owing to the different ticketing systems that Translink and Bus Éireann operate.

I can also confirm that my Department and the Department of Transport in the South have been working together on a pilot project to identify the need and demand for rural cross-border services at community level. The pilot project has been operating in south-west Fermanagh and north-west Cavan, and I hope to bring a full report to the North/South Ministerial Council later this year.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Does he have any knowledge of the Golden Trekker free rail travel pass that pertains to the South? Might a similar concession for visitors to the North be considered?

The Minister for Regional Development: Obviously, the Golden Trekker scheme is specifically linked to the promotion of tourism. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has made my officials aware of the scheme, which was introduced in the South in March 2010. There are plans for a similar scheme that is aimed at individuals who are over 66 years of age and are resident in England, Scotland and Wales. The relative exchange rate provides the North with a material competitive advantage. Fare promotions already operate on Enterprise services. I have asked Translink to discuss such a scheme with Tourism Ireland and DETI to establish the operational issues.

Any arrangements would have to ensure that Translink was properly reimbursed. I have also taken the opportunity to have discussions with Tourism Ireland. The scheme is certainly worth consideration. Obviously, the intention is to attract more visitors from our offshore island, Britain. As a result, some promotional fare schemes have been put forward. The scheme in the South has proven quite successful. We will be interested to look at how we can operate such a scheme in the North.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister expand on the role that he envisages community transport associations playing in cross-border transport arrangements?

The Minister for Regional Development: Cross-border transport arrangements feature strongly in North/South Ministerial Council meetings. The transport sector is one of the Council's formal operations. In those sectoral meetings, we discuss regularly the wide range of cross-border transportation systems with the relevant companies: Iarnród Éireann, NIR, Translink and bus companies in the South. As I said in my answer to the original question, that discussion includes community transport arrangements. A pilot scheme exists in Fermanagh and Cavan.

Therefore, there has been ongoing excellent co-operation between transport companies, North and South. There is ministerial direction to improve that co-operation where possible, such as looking at integrated ticketing to ensure that people who want to avail themselves of public transport throughout the island can do so, and to improve those systems where possible, if there are sufficient resources. The intention is to integrate the transport system as much as possible and thereby encourage more people to use it throughout the island.

Mr Kennedy: Can the Minister report to the House whether the welcome improvements and complete refurbishment of Newry railway station, which were completed recently, have resulted in increased numbers of passengers who use the station?

The Minister for Regional Development: I agree with the Member that the £14 million refurbishment of Newry railway station is a welcome addition to the Belfast to Dublin line. It has certainly attracted much positive commentary and, indeed, has been put forward for architectural awards.

Passenger numbers for before and after the station's refurbishment have not yet been recorded, but I will ask Translink to provide an assessment, which I will make available to the Member.

Roads: North Down

3. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on plans to improve the roads infrastructure in North Down. (AQO 1257/10)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Roads Service has advised that it plans to resurface a section of the A2 Belfast to Bangor Road between the Ballyrobert Road and the Ballysallagh Road during summer 2010, at an estimated cost of £472,000. Roads Service also continues to progress plans for other proposed schemes in the North Down Borough Council area. Roads Service has identified a preferred layout for a scheme to improve safety and traffic flow in the Craigantlet hills area. Its consultants are finalising a route management study for the A2 Belfast to Bangor Road.

In addition, local transportation and safety measures are planned for the North Down Borough Council area. Details can be found in Roads Service's autumn 2009 council report for North Down, which is available on the Department's website. Although other schemes, such as the completion of the Westlink and M2 works were not undertaken in the North Down Borough Council area, they have increased accessibility to North Down from Belfast.

As Members will be aware, in February 2010, I announced the preferred option for improvements to the A2 Sydenham bypass and confirmed the widening of the existing road to provide three lanes in each direction between the M3 and Tillysburn. Other schemes that are identified in the investment delivery plan that should also improve accessibility to the North Down area are the A55 Knock Road and York Street junction projects.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer and particularly for his commitment to the schemes that he mentioned. I appreciate that there are funding limitations.

Does the Minister accept, even in principle, that there is a problem with capacity on the roads in outer Bangor, where ever more housing developments are being authorised by the

Planning Service? Roads that are, essentially, C class — in particular, the Rathgael Road — now operate far beyond any capacity for which they were ever used previously. When roadworks were carried out recently, those problems were exposed. Does the Minister have any plans to address the problems of the under-capacity of roads in Bangor town?

The Minister for Regional Development: At my last Question Time, I answered a question about the management of the roadworks that caused particular problems in Bangor. There was an acknowledgement that they were not handled as well as they could have been, and lessons were learned from that. The experience that the Member refers to is one that is repeated in urban areas across the North. There is a steady increase in the volume of traffic, due to the increase in the number of private cars and commercial vehicles on the roads, and, as a consequence, roads that were not built for such a volume of traffic are struggling with capacity. Bangor is no different from anywhere else.

Consultants are finalising a route management study for the A2 Belfast to Bangor road. That study was delayed due to the introduction of the average-speed camera system in 2008 and the availability of subsequent collision information. However, proposals for that route will depend on funding, as I said at the outset, and the successful completion of the statutory processes. In relation to the congestion issue that the Member mentioned, it is an experience that has been shared elsewhere, but Roads Service is trying to find the best possible solution to it. In relation to the Belfast to Bangor road, it is bringing forward a study to find a solution to the issue.

Mr Cree: As usual, the Minister is helpful in his replies. Can he tell me whether the proposed Belfast to Bangor motorway, which was on the statute books but never actually got built, might possibly be resurrected as a solution? Can he give some idea of when the Craigantlet junction might be sorted out if there is no motorway over the hills?

The Minister for Regional Development: To be honest, the resurrection of the Belfast to Bangor motorway is highly unlikely. That scheme has never been raised with me. It is not identified in the forward plans of Roads Service, and it is likely that the aim is to improve the A2 Belfast to Bangor road instead.

Roads Service has identified a preferred layout for a scheme to improve safety and traffic flow in the Craigtantlet hills. Engineers are carrying out detailed designs to enable the statutory processes to commence. However, progression of the scheme, as with others, is subject to the availability of finance. It is unlikely to be considered for programming before 2013.

Transport: Security Alerts

4. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had or what steps his Department is taking to keep open railways and roads, in light of the increased number of security alerts. (AQO 1258/10)

The Minister for Regional Development:

The forced closure of both our rail and roads networks due to security alerts is, of course, very serious for the safety of the travelling public and for its negative impact on the all-Ireland economy. I am kept informed by officials as necessary, particularly in relation to what are considered the most major incidents. However, by and large, those are operational matters for Translink and Roads Service, with the PSNI having primacy in such matters.

There are already standard procedures between NIR and the PSNI, which become operational as soon as a security alert is reported. NIR liaises closely with the PSNI in its response to reported security issues on the rail network. The PSNI is wholly responsible for all security assessments and for advising NIR when it is considered necessary to close a railway line. If a part of the network is closed, NIR focuses on maintaining transport links and business continuity, invariably by establishing alternative transport provision through bus substitution and by ensuring that customers and staff receive timely updates on the likely impact of revised travel arrangements.

It is a matter for the PSNI to assess the safety risks and to determine whether a line should be closed and when it is safe to open. I am satisfied that there is good co-ordination between NIR and the PSNI on the security of the rail network. Those protocols have been in place for some time.

The role of Roads Service is to deal with the effects and consequences for road users of any such closure. For the purpose of minimising

traffic disruptions arising from the closure of any roads on the strategic roads network in Roads Service's eastern division due to security alerts or for other reasons, a joint protocol was developed with the PSNI. The protocol was originally drawn up specifically for major critical incidents declared by the PSNI, and it deals with issues such as communication between Roads Service and PSNI command and control, liaison with support services and a joint information strategy.

The joint protocol has been in existence for two years and has been updated in light of lessons learned during that period. Work is also under way between Roads Service and the PSNI to produce an equivalent joint protocol for the whole of the strategic roads network. That should be completed by autumn of this year.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive reply. I recently visited Londonderry with the Minister's colleague Martina Anderson —

Ms Anderson: *[Interruption.]*

Mr B McCrea: In the interests of goodwill, I will refer to it as Derry/Londonderry if that will make it easier.

I heard at first hand about the disruption that is caused in the city when the bridges are closed. Does the Minister think that it would be worthwhile engaging with the Chief Constable to see whether there is anything that staff in Roads Service or Translink can do to minimise such situations, which — I think that we all agree — are not very helpful given that we are trying to develop the Northern Ireland economy.

3.15 pm

The Minister for Regional Development: I have no issues about engaging with the Chief Constable. Even though the protocols are operational, established and working, there are only two crossings over the Foyle river in that area, so if one or both of the bridges is closed, there will inevitably be disruption. I am not sure what a meeting with the Chief Constable could do to change that.

As I say, joint protocols were specifically developed for the eastern division, where there has been some disruption. Those protocols are being rolled out across the roads network. The north-west and Derry will obviously be included in that. The protocols will build on the good practice that has been learnt from those

developed in this part of the North over the past two years. If people feel, for some reason, that a meeting between me and the Chief Constable is necessary to improve the situation, I am more than happy to take part. However, it has been Roads Service's experience that the protocols have worked quite well.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister may or may not be aware of the work that elected and community representatives have done with police and Translink to try to minimise disruption in that area. In his response to the question, the Minister spoke about the need for timely information. It is important to get information out about other routes. Will the Minister tell the House whether there is any way in which that might be improved? What is the Minister's view on placing CCTV cameras along strategic areas that are at risk of security alerts, particularly in Lurgan, to help to identify and to bring to justice those responsible for causing them?

The Minister for Regional Development: NIR believes that the focus of the operational arrangements between it and the PSNI is to ensure that information is available to people and that alternative transport arrangements are in place. That inevitably means putting on a bus substitution service between the points that have been disconnected on the railway network.

The use of CCTV and the pursuit of those responsible for causing the closure of railway lines are matters for the PSNI. If the PSNI requires Translink's co-operation to locate CCTV, I am sure that it will seek it. Detection and prosecution of those responsible for security alerts are primarily matters for the PSNI.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell the House what impact the increased number of security alerts has had on Translink finances?

The Minister for Regional Development: There was a security alert last night and another one today. It is, therefore, difficult to be definitive about what impact they have. The number of passengers using local rail has held up fairly well, but security alerts clearly impact on passenger confidence. NIR has invested in a significant fare discount and marketing strategy for the Enterprise to restore passenger numbers following the incident at Malahide, which was not security related. Security alerts together with the economic downturn mean that we must be realistic about future passenger numbers

and the financial impact of that. We are in discussions with Translink about the issue.

Airspace Closure

5. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Great Britain in relation to the closure of Northern Ireland's airspace in recent weeks. (AQO 1259/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have not been involved in discussions about the closure of airspace. The control of airspace over the North is a reserved matter. Decisions about closures are taken by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in consultation with the National Air Traffic Services (NATS), the Met Office and the Department for Transport. However, I have been receiving regular updates about flight restrictions from the Department for Transport in London, CAA and NATS. I have also been in direct contact with Noel Dempsey, my counterpart in the South, and my Department is receiving updates on the position with Irish airspace.

CAA has announced that from 12.00 noon on 18 May 2010, new measures will be brought into effect to reduce airspace closures that are caused by volcanic ash. Those measures have been agreed with the Irish Aviation Authority. The new area of operations that is being introduced creates a time-limited zone between the black no-fly zone and the red enhanced-procedures zone. Aircraft and engine manufacturers have agreed, based on new research and analysis, that it is safe to allow operations in the new zone for a limited time at higher ash densities than is currently permitted. The new zone area will be established using Met Office forecasts and will be approved by CAA before operations are allowed within it. Effectively, those measures mean that areas of British and Irish airspace that would have been closed previously can now open safely, thereby further minimising flight disruption.

As a result of that change, there are no predicted restrictions on either British or Irish airspace in the immediate future. I will be meeting our three airport operators shortly to discuss these measures and what my Department and the Executive can do to assist in the event of further disruption over the summer months.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has collated general information from all affected organisations and Governments on the impact of flight restrictions and the response to them. That information has been shared and discussed with the relevant Departments and agencies throughout the civil contingencies group mechanism.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Has he had discussions with his Executive colleagues, especially the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, about what he could do in the event of further disruption to provide alternative transport to make sure that the impact on the business and tourism sectors is limited?

The Minister for Regional Development: Not yet, but it is my intention to do so. As I said, I will be meeting the three airport operators in the North. As I understand it, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is also meeting them to talk about future provision. Obviously, most of us had hoped that the volcanic ash cloud was a one-off incident that, when the initial disruption was over, would not reoccur. However, it looks as though there is at least the possibility that it will be an ongoing occurrence. Therefore, we need to make contingency plans to deal with that, particularly over the summer months when we are very dependent on tourism traffic.

I intend to meet the airport operators and to raise this issue at the next Executive meeting so that I can discuss it with all my Executive colleagues. Even though we do not have authority over who can fly and when, whatever the Executive can do, collectively or through individual Departments, we must do to our utmost to ensure that there is minimum disruption. We must encourage more and more people to travel here so that we do not suffer a downturn in the tourist trade or the economic effects that that would have over the summer months.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What plans are in place to get stranded passengers home should another disruption occur?

The Minister for Regional Development: In association with Translink, the ports and airports, we are doing everything that we can to help passengers. Translink is prepared to operate additional bus and rail services to help cope with the increase in foot passengers on

cross-channel ferry services should further airport closures occur. Additional cross-channel coach services can also be operated in conjunction with Scottish Citylink, National Express and Eurolines. Translink continues to monitor the situation, and, if required, it will increase its capacity further to help passengers get to their destinations.

Up to 9,000 passengers can be carried by Stena Line between Belfast and Stranraer. Norfolk Line is providing 1,000 passenger places each day between Belfast and Liverpool, and P&O Ferries is providing up to 10,000 passenger places each day between Larne and Cairnryan and Larne and Troon. The facility remains for most ferries to allocate additional staff for booking services should another prolonged disruption occur. Belfast and Larne have the capacity to accommodate any additional sailings to and from their ports. We will work closely with transport providers to ensure that we can continue to accommodate the additional demand on alternative services.

Mr I McCrea: In a previous answer, the Minister referred to contingency plans. Will he advise the House of the contingency plans that he has in place to get to Westminster to serve the people who recently elected him?

The Minister for Regional Development: The same contingency plans —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have to intervene, Minister. That is not a relevant supplementary question. We must move on.

Water Charges: Utility Regulator

7. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the appropriate role of the Utility Regulator on the issue of water charging. (AQO 1261/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: Policy decisions on the future funding of water and sewerage services are the Executive's responsibility. In 2007, I appointed the Independent Water Review Panel to make recommendations. In light of the global economic downturn, the Executive decided to defer the introduction of additional household payments for water and sewerage services, and they have extended that deferral until 2010-11. The Executive agreed to consult on any proposals coming out of the independent panel's strand 2 report, including any

recommendations concerning the Utility Regulator. In the meantime, the Executive are providing three quarters of NIW's funding through subsidy. The Assembly recently agreed the extension of that arrangement until 2013.

Current roles in the water sector do not necessarily reflect the fact that the majority of water and sewerage services provision is through public expenditure. I have said that I will look at all options in addressing this matter. However, clearly, the Assembly and Executive's decisions need to be reflected.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. What is his assessment of the need for the Utility Regulator to be genuinely independent and the benefits of that situation?

The Minister for Regional Development: The regulator should be independent. He has responsibility for other utilities in which his independence is very important.

With regard to water, the regulator's role was established in anticipation of a set of circumstances that have not been realised. Under direct rule, it was anticipated that NIW would become a self-funding organisation. The Executive have taken different decisions, and NIW remains largely funded by the public purse.

Therefore, the role that was envisaged for the regulator is not the one that has transpired over the past number of years. Although his advice and guidance to both me and NIW is very important, as is the independence of that, we are dealing with different circumstances from those that were envisaged when the regulator's role was set up in our ongoing treatment of NIW and its funding requirements.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given what he just said, will the Minister give us some pointers on how he sees the future role of the regulator?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said in my previous answer, the regulator's role has not panned out as envisaged in the direct rule proposals. However, the regulator looks at many different aspects of NIW, including financial monitoring and performance. The future role of the regulator depends on the Executive's decisions about household payments for water and sewerage services. Once those decisions are made, we will be in a better position to decide the best structure for

the delivery of water and sewerage services. If household payments continue to be deferred, it is difficult to see how NIW's funding could be based solely on the regulator's price-control process, given that almost three quarters of that funding comes from subsidy.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister tell us what role he envisages playing if Northern Ireland Water needs more funding?

The Minister for Regional Development: I will play the role that I played when I secured the funding that I believed was required for NIW. That involves discussing the issue with my Executive colleagues, particularly the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Other people bring to the table what they consider to be the funding requirements of their Departments, and we argue as best we can for what we believe to be the funding requirements for different aspects of our areas of responsibility. I did that recently, and we managed to reach agreement on the budget that I considered was required for NIW for this year. Obviously, there are indicative figures for the two years beyond that.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: How does the Minister intend to provide improved water services while ensuring better value for money?

The Minister for Regional Development: We see examples of that every day. NIW is investing about £1 million every working day to improve water and sewerage infrastructure. As the Member knows well, I have been to north Antrim to open quite a few of the projects that have resulted from that investment. The Member knows well the state that we were in a number of years back, when we were on the verge of incurring charges from Europe due to pollution. The investment that has taken place since then has seen off the threat of those charges. The quality of the provision of water and sewerage services is now much better.

There needs to be continued investment so that improvements to the service continue. We started from a very low base and a lack of investment for some 20 years, so essentially we have been playing a lot of catch-up. Tomorrow, I will open the Belfast Sewers Project, which is the result of over £100 million of investment in this city and was absolutely vital to protecting the service here. Therefore, a very substantial investment is continuing, which has been yielding good results. We will continue to argue for that investment in NIW.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place to ask question 8. I should have announced that question 6 had been withdrawn. Questions 9 and 13 have also been withdrawn.

Belfast Marathon

10. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister for Regional Development why his Department is supporting the proposal to change the date of the Belfast marathon from the May Day holiday to a Sunday. (AQO 1264/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I understand that the Belfast City Marathon is arranged by an organising committee, involving Belfast City Council and other partners and sponsors. My Department is not represented on that committee. However, Roads Service plays an active part in a supporting technical committee, which has responsibility for developing details of how the event will operate and how its effect on road users can be minimised.

The marathon traditionally takes place on the first bank holiday Monday in May. I understand that the chairman of Belfast City Marathon Limited recently sought support from Belfast City Council to move the marathon event to a Sunday. I understand that although the council's development committee agreed to support the proposed change from May 2011 onwards at its meeting in April, the council has subsequently decided that the marathon will not be held on a Sunday next year.

I am aware that there has been erroneous press coverage of the issue, including a statement to the effect that Roads Service had written a letter of support for the proposed change to a Sunday for future events. In fact, Roads Service officials advised Belfast City Council that although they had no objections to the proposed change, they were unable to actively support it.

I understand that Translink wrote to the Belfast City Marathon event manager in January stating that, from an operational point of view, it would prefer the marathon to take place on the Sunday before the May Day bank holiday. It has been Translink's experience that the increased number of participants, together with route modifications, has resulted in a high level of disruption to bus services.

That disruption impacts negatively on passengers and leads to increased costs. Translink has further advised that it will continue to support

whatever decisions are reached by the event organisers for future marathons.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his answer. I was pleased to learn that Belfast City Council is to consult widely on the issue before any decision is made. To what extent were the equality requirements of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 considered in supporting the change of the day of the marathon from a Monday to a Sunday?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said, my Department is not directly involved with the committee that organises the event. Roads Service is indirectly involved with regard to road accessibility. Therefore, I cannot say what consultation was undertaken or what equality requirements the committee considered in reaching its proposed decision. If there is to be consultation in the future, that would be a matter to be taken up with the committee.

3.30 pm

Mr Elliott: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You mentioned, at almost the end of Question Time, that question 15 had been withdrawn. That was my question, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I was just wondering —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 13 was withdrawn.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much.

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the uncertainty surrounding the Minister of Education's convergence delivery plan and the impact this is having on staff morale across the education sector; and calls on the Minister to update the Assembly on progress made to date. — [Mr B McCrea.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "uncertainty" and insert

"and lack of transparency surrounding the Minister of Education's convergence delivery plan and the impact this is having on staff morale across the education sector; further notes the unacceptable failure to properly reconstitute the education and library boards within a reasonable time frame, which is contributing to a democratic deficit; and calls on the Minister to update the Assembly on progress made to date." — [Miss McIlveen.]

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 uncertainty and lack of transparency surrounding the Minister of Education's convergence delivery plan and the impact this is having on staff morale across the education sector; further notes the unacceptable failure to properly reconstitute the education and library boards within a reasonable time frame, which is contributing to a democratic deficit; and calls on the Minister to update the Assembly on progress made to date.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Castle Tower School, Ballymena

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to propose. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately 10 minutes.

Mr Storey: I want to begin by paying tribute to an individual and then a group. First, I want to give public acknowledgement to the excellent work that has been carried out by my Assembly colleague Reverend Robert Coulter, chairman of the board of governors of Castle Tower, and the entire board of governors. Many people are indebted to Reverend Coulter for his unstinting efforts on behalf of Castle Tower School, and it is only right that his commitment and perseverance on behalf of Castle Tower are recognised and applauded. I assure the Member that the fact that this topic was selected for debate is in no way an attempt to undermine the excellent work that he has done. I pay tribute to his work and assistance, even in bringing the debate to the Floor.

Secondly, I pay tribute to the Castle Tower staff and all associated with the school. The school was formed in September 2007, when the three special schools in Ballymena amalgamated, with each coming under the jurisdiction of one campus. Dunfane campus caters for children with moderate learning difficulties in Key Stages 1 to 4, for pupils older than 16 years of age, and it has a life skills unit; Beechgrove campus caters for children with physical difficulties from pre-school to year 7, after which pupils transfer to a mainstream school or to another special school for their post-primary education; and Loughan campus caters for children with severe learning difficulties in Key Stages 1 to 4.

Castle Tower School continues to provide outreach services to a number of local primary schools, aiming to support pupils with special needs and their teachers. It is a school to be proud of, and it delivers excellence that cannot be bettered anywhere else. However, all that excellence is delivered in spite of the many daily difficulties that the school faces.

The accommodation in the school is highly inappropriate to meet the diverse needs of the young people in its care. The school currently provides education and care for 258 pupils, ranging in age from three years to 19 and in ability from pupils who are capable of gaining GCSE qualifications in some subjects to young people with the most profound difficulties and complex needs.

Castle Tower School cares for children who have heartbreaking disabilities. Many of the pupils are wheelchair users or have restricted mobility alongside their learning difficulties, but some mobile classrooms do not even have appropriate disabled access. That fact alone ought to be all that the Minister needs to spark her into action. She and I frequently clash over her priorities and about how she allocates her budget, but surely she cannot disagree today that she ought to prioritise such a crying need at this time.

We are dealing with some of the most vulnerable young people in society, in one of the worst educational environments in Northern Ireland. Our young people simply deserve better. It is the Minister's Department; it is the Minister's responsibility; and it is the Minister's decision. The debate is not about the school's estate, departmental directives or party political disagreements. It is about disabled children attending a school in which too many classrooms have no disabled or otherwise appropriate access.

Apart from the ongoing health and safety issues that Castle Tower School deals with daily, the lack of appropriate facilities also has a direct impact on the pupils' learning and on the educational environment. In a February 2010 inspection report, 95% of the lessons observed were rated as "good" to "outstanding", but the report commented on how the school environment had a negative impact on the pupils' learning. The staff and all associated with the school should be commended for the way in which they continue to deliver the service, and I pay tribute to the leadership of the school's principal, who, I am delighted to say, is in the Public Gallery.

Castle Tower School has highly skilled and professional staff who were acknowledged by the inspection report. However, the pupils' progress is being seriously hampered by their environment. I listened with great intent to what the Minister said in the debate on the

convergence delivery plan about her concern and her care. She said that we were all concerned about underachievement. We will test that concern in the Minister's response to the House later on.

Let me cut through all the rhetoric: the debate is about some of society's most vulnerable children. They are in the care of some of the most outstanding professionals in Northern Ireland, but they are being hampered, hindered, held back and condemned to a lesser future because of a learning environment that has been created by indecision and the state of the school's facilities. The Minister must act. I urge her, as she did on behalf of Whitehouse Primary School, to act responsibly and immediately.

Let me outline some of the health and safety issues that were raised in the inspection report. The roof of the Dunfane campus building is in a poor state of repair. There are many leaks, which resulted in the temporary closure of the school's ICT suite during the inspection. The roof is leaking in the home economics room and in the technology and design suite. Machines and equipment have been damaged by water leaking through the roof. There are problems with the roof in other parts of the building, including the corridors. Buckets were used to collect drips from the leaking corridor roof during the inspection. Is that the environment that we want our children to be educated in?

Pupils who use wheelchairs cannot participate fully in lessons in the science, technology or home economics departments, as the benches, sinks and worktops are unsuitable. They have difficulty gaining access to some of the mobile classrooms because ramps are not always readily provided. The mobile classrooms and some of the main external doors on the Dunfane campus are in a poor state of repair. Vehicular access to the Dunfane and Beechgrove campuses is very restricted. The car parks are so inadequate for the number of cars that the children's playground is used as a car park for staff vehicles. The Beechgrove campus building is in a poor state of repair with single-glazed, metal-framed windows, some of which were broken at the time of the inspection. The heating in one of the classrooms on that campus is inadequate. The play area cannot be used.

I could go on and on. Approximately 50% of teaching at the Loughan campus takes place in mobile classrooms that are in a poor state

of repair. That has a detrimental effect on the quality of learning. The therapy treatment rooms are inadequately sized, and therapists often have to use classrooms to work with pupils.

In addition to those issues, Castle Tower School recently had to move a group of pupils out of their classroom after a smell of electrical burning was noticed. It is suspected to have been caused by water leaking through the roof into a fuse box.

The Minister recently released £3.2 million for the design stage of the Lisanelly education development, yet the economic appraisal for that has not been passed by the Department of Education. Castle Tower School's economic appraisal is at the final stage of approval, and I understand that it is currently with the Department of Finance and Personnel. I have with me the timeline for that economic appraisal, which goes from 24 July 2006 to 4 May 2010. To any independent assessor or observer looking at how efficient we are as an Executive, an Assembly or a devolved Administration, it would appear to be a list of failure: revision, more information, revision, more information, requirement for clarification, referral to the economic assessment unit and the business unit. What we have is a bureaucratic nightmare, and all that we have ever asked for is delivery for Castle Tower School. Firm decisions need to be taken, and the Minister should take those decisions without delay.

The Minister has spoken of her commitment to her duty under the law and her statutory obligations towards integrated education. She will be aware that Braidside Integrated Primary and Nursery School is waiting for the Castle Tower announcement. Once that announcement is made, the Dunfane campus can be vacated and Braidside can develop and refurbish the site. The situation not only affects Castle Tower School, which is of the utmost importance, but, because of the delay, it impacts on Braidside school. We wait to hear from the Minister why there has been this delay.

I urge the Minister to listen to the genuine pleas and concerns not only from me as the elected representative for the area but from my colleagues, who I have no doubt will give me unanimous support, and to concur with the desire of Ballymena Borough Council. She has received correspondence from that council

regarding its campaign. It has asked other councils in the area to support the Castle Tower project. Living in Ballymoney, I know that some of my North Antrim constituents travel to the facility in Ballymena and would be at a loss without it.

3.45 pm

We came to the House today with knowledge not only of what Members and councils have said but of what the Minister said in the House on Tuesday 3 November 2009. On that occasion, in response to my colleague Rev Robert Coulter, she said that she had had a wonderful morning on her visit to Castle Tower. She said that the North Eastern Education and Library Board was revising — not for the first time — an economic appraisal for the major capital works scheme.

The Minister went on to say:

"The board has advised us that that will be resubmitted shortly."

And it was. She continued:

"Following approval of the appraisal, I have agreed that the project should progress immediately to project design and implementation stage. The scheme will then be in a very strong position to compete for funding from a future capital funding announcement. I assure the House that my Department and I are treating the scheme as an urgent priority." — [Official Report, Vol 45, No 2, p98, col 1].

I want the Minister to clarify to the House where we are with that. Is Castle Tower, unfortunately, in the same position as, we were told, Whitehouse Primary School? The Whitehouse scheme was caught up in the review of capital works. However, the Minister then announced, all of a sudden, that she had seen the review and that work on the project could progress. I believe that that was done, rightly so, only because of public pressure and the issues that had been raised.

If the Minister has had sight of the review of capital projects, I trust that she will be in a position to tell the House this afternoon where Castle Tower sits in relation to that review. Does the Minister still support the project? Does she still have a desire to see the Castle Tower project move forward? Will the commitments that she gave in November 2009 be brought to full fruition so that we can move forward and address the uncertainty, concern, fear, worry and

huge practical problems that have arisen as a result of inaction?

This is a plea to the Minister from everyone who is involved with or supportive of Castle Tower. We want the Minister to set out clearly how the project will be delivered and the timescale in which it will be delivered, rather than give the standard, state-of-the-art departmental reply. The Minister could then revisit the school in the full assurance that she had not only gone to see the problem but had taken action to resolve it and delivered for the pupils and everyone else associated with Castle Tower. I ask the Minister to ensure, on this occasion, that children are really at the heart of all that she does as the Minister of Education.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I declare an interest as chairperson of the school's governing board. Needless to say, I support my colleague in what he said and the proposition that he put to the Minister and the House. It is difficult to know where to begin after the school's problems have been set out so comprehensively by my honourable colleague. However, as I think of the situation that we are in at Castle Tower, the first people that I must pay tribute to are its principal and staff.

I have been associated with the school for some years now, and I have witnessed the deterioration year on year. It is a disaster for any school for staff to be told that the play equipment that the children enjoy using is dangerous and must be chained up. The playground at Castle Tower had to be closed because it is unsafe, and there are problems with the condition of the building in which the staff work and the children learn. As my colleague said, the very essence of education is being denied to the most vulnerable section of our school people.

The difficulties involved in bringing together three schools were great, and I pay tribute to the principal and staff for the efforts they made to come together and make the whole project work. It has been tremendous. However, being saddled with all three campuses undervalues the provision of education for those vulnerable children and makes the whole situation so much worse. Added to that is the fact that the site for the school already exists. The ground has been acquired, and everything is in place — except that the Department is not moving forward. Again and again, as my colleague has said, this

matter has been tossed back and forth and has been handled as though it were in a game of ping-pong. Repeatedly, our hopes have risen only to be dashed because some minor element in the process has been thrown at it once again.

If I could take you, Deputy Speaker, and let you see the work of the parents and the community in supporting this school, you would see immediately that this is not something that is merely sectarian or of minor value. Our project in Ballymena touches every aspect of the community. When one sees those children, with all their disabilities and impediments, beginning their education and beginning to develop, take an interest in things, go forward, gain confidence in life and feel that, at the end of the journey, there is something for them that they can do to contribute to their own life, it is fantastic. It is very satisfying to the whole community, as well as to the staff who teach them and to the parents who are so pleased to see them develop. Our hearts go out to them. We feel that we are being denied something in the community by not having a proper school in which to teach those children.

I pay tribute to the borough council. We hosted the mayor, and the council took cognizance of what we said. The local newspapers are backing us. People cannot understand why the Education Department cannot find the finance to take forward a project that needs to be designed and then built, which will take a number of years. Why is it that, though we have the site and the determination to go forward, those things cannot happen? What is the impediment in the Department that is holding back the project? Is the Department unable to realise the significance of the project? What more do we have to do? We feel that we have done everything to push the project forward and enable our children, who are deprived of an education, to get assistance that will give them a life. This is not just about education; it is about the whole issue of giving children a life, not only during their years of education but during their lifetime. We do not condemn anyone. We are begging, pleading, asking. Why is this particular project being held back when others are going forward?

I ask the Minister to take another look at this; to see it again in a different light; to take it forward as speedily as she can; and to give to the people of Ballymena and the college's staff, principal and board an assurance that there

will be no more impediments to progress. Will she assure us that we can look forward to the implementation of the plan for the new school in the very near future? We can then rejoice with the children in what we can give them. I support Mr Storey.

Mr O’Loan: I congratulate my North Antrim colleague Mervyn Storey on securing an Adjournment debate on this important issue. I also thank him for the strong but measured way in which he presented the case.

I want to start a little bit further back than Mr Storey did, with a press release about the new Castle Tower School that was issued by the Department of Education on 24 July 2006. It is named Castle Tower School because uppermost in the minds of those planning the school was the fact that the site of the new school was adjacent to the site of the former Ballymena Castle. When the announcement was made, a new school was very much framed in their thinking. The Department’s press release almost four years ago said of the schools involved:

“They will amalgamate on the former site of Ballymena Boys’ and Girls’ Schools on completion of a new building ... While the new amalgamated school will have a single management structure it has been agreed that each special educational need will continue to be supported through separate specialist provision as operates under current arrangements.”

It is important to recognise that the three constituent schools perform quite different functions and contain differing categories of children. I will not go into that in detail because Mervyn Storey has already done it well. However, I note that already, in this press statement, the Department was telling us that Beechgrove Special School had:

“a number of accommodation issues requiring urgent attention”,

that Dunfane Special School had:

“one main building and three mobile classrooms and currently has a number of accommodation deficiencies”,

and that Loughan Special School also had “accommodation deficiencies”.

That was the situation in 2006. We know that there has been no major refurbishment in the meantime because of the plan to replace the three school buildings with a new building. We

have heard stories of leaking roofs and so on. One assumes that some attempt has been made to repair the leaks, but the three sites are obviously deteriorating, and no substantial refurbishment can happen in the meantime.

In September 2009, in reply to my question for written answer, the Minister told me that the proposal was at economic appraisal stage, that the North Eastern Education and Library Board were commenting on that and that, following the expected approval of the economic appraisal:

“it has been agreed that the scheme will proceed to project development and design stage. The project will then be in a strong position to compete for funding”.

In February 2010, in correspondence with Ballymena Borough Council, which has been energetic on the matter and of which I am a member, the Minister stated that a revised economic appraisal was currently being considered by the Department’s economic advisers. Therefore, we had moved on a stage at that point. The Minister told the council that it was not possible to provide a timescale for approval, but I am glad that she said:

“the project is being treated as a high priority by officials.”

She also stated that the project, following approval of the economic appraisal, would be in a position to compete with others for funding from any future capital announcement. However, at that point no decision had been taken on the timing of the next capital announcement.

4.00 pm

In passing, I will mention that the Minister’s party colleague on Ballymena Borough Council is very critical of what she has or has not done. With a lack of realism, her party colleague tells us that special needs pupils should not have to compete for funding with anyone. All of us in the Chamber today are keen that this project should go ahead, but I do not think that it fools anyone to come out with that kind of talk and say that special needs schools do not have to compete with anyone else for funding. The Minister does not have a bottomless pot labelled “special needs education” in order that any special needs project can be funded automatically. There has to be a prioritisation of projects, and I will comment particularly about that.

Our genuine complaint about the performance of the Minister and the Department relates first to false expectations that have been created over a period of four years. Even quite recently, I was hearing talk that it could be another five years before the project is completed. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us that that is not the case. It is very difficult for the school's management and its principal, Mr McFeeters, who is here to observe the debate today and whom I welcome. The principal and the board of governors, led by Reverend Coulter, do an excellent job, and there is clear testimony to that effect in the recent inspectorate report to which Mr Storey referred.

I want to bring a sense of realism to the debate. Although there have been delays at various stages of this project and many others, the Minister, as far as I know, is not returning money to the Department of Finance and Personnel and saying that she has not spent it. Of course, there are different ways of funding schools; not all funds come straight from the Department's pocket. Nonetheless, even if economic appraisals came through for many projects more rapidly than they do currently, which they should, the money, ultimately, has to be available to build the schools. There is not an infinite sum of money. However, we are entitled to ask the Minister how the prioritisation of projects takes place.

Recently, the Minister embarked on a review of all capital projects. I take it that that was on foot of a reduction in her budget for the next year as part of the cuts to all Departments. However, I find it surprising that she needed to undertake a review of all capital projects. It seems to me that, if a meaningful and appropriate system for prioritising projects already exists, the fact that her budget was reduced should not have required a complete new system or revision of all projects. I would appreciate an answer from the Minister on that point. I would also appreciate it if she could tell us something about what is emerging from that capital review.

With respect to the situation at Whitehouse Primary School, I, like all Members, welcome the fact that funding has been given to that very urgent and necessary scheme. Nonetheless, that scheme was singled out for decision and report to the public. I wonder about that, when there are many other schemes, including the one that we are discussing, which, for those affected, are

every bit as significant. There has to be a proper and fair process regarding all schools.

On the face of it, to those who are involved with the issue locally, this scheme ought to have a very high priority because of the clear great needs of the school and the very long delay. If the Minister has an explanation to give, it should be around how she establishes her priorities and why, a full four years after the decision to amalgamate was taken, there is still no declared timescale for the newbuild on a single site for the Castle Tower School.

I appreciate the Minister's presence, and, in her reply, I hope that she will go considerably further than she has hitherto in public and declare a timescale for completing the project. Furthermore, I hope that she will endorse the case that other Members and I have articulated and that she will make a statement about an early conclusion to this saga by telling us when the Castle Tower School newbuild will happen.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane):

Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, mar aibhseoidh sí réimse ríthábhachtach dár n-earnáil oideachais — soláthar riachtanas oideachais speisialta.

I welcome the debate, which highlights a vital area in the education sector: special educational needs provision. The topic reminds us that almost one in five children in our schools has special educational needs and that, for a variety of reasons, including social and economic disadvantage, up to one in four children experiences greater learning difficulties than their peers. The debate also affords me an opportunity to highlight the significant challenges and tough decisions that my Department faces in light of its reduced capital budget allocation and the uncertainty surrounding future allocations.

First, I recognise fully the difficult conditions that the principal, staff and pupils of Castle Tower School have to endure. I am particularly conscious that the most vulnerable children are being educated in poor accommodation. I also appreciate that the difficulties of operating a school on a split-site campus will be alleviated fully only by a fit-for-purpose school building. I heard the concerns that were expressed about Castle Tower Special School, and I am acutely aware that building any new school makes a significant difference not only to children but to teachers and the wider community. I visited the

school, and I pay tribute to Rev Robert Coulter's work and to the work of those in the school.

Unfortunately, prior to my time many schools were given approval. The Department is ensuring that it prioritises its available resources to build up the schools estate. In July 2009, by amalgamating three schools on a common campus — the former site of Ballymena Boys' High School and Ballymena Girls' High School — the Department approved a statutory development proposal to form Castle Tower School. In 2008, the North Eastern Education and Library Board brought forward a revised economic appraisal for the project, which was reviewed and scrutinised as a matter of urgency by its technical and economic advisers.

Since then, the Executive have reduced my Department's budget, and I now face a challenging position on investing in the schools estate, including a £22 million cut to address increased public expenditure pressures facing the Executive. All parties represented in the Chamber supported that cut, which my Department has to implement. Since May 2007, the Department has completed 39 newbuild projects, representing an investment of more than £253 million in the schools estate. This year, the available works funding will be used to complete seven projects that are currently on site. In addition, a further seven newbuild projects are under construction, including Magherafelt High School, where £6.9 million will be invested in 2010-11, Lisbellaw Primary School and St Patrick's and St Brigid's Primary School in Ballycastle. When we have extra money, I will look to see which projects we will bring forward.

We must recognise that, in addition to major works, the depleted capital budget covers a range of areas, including youth projects, school transport, early years and minor works in an estate comprising more than 1,200 schools. However, in 2010-11, my reduced budget means that tough choices are inevitable. I assure the Assembly that, in this financial year, I will continue to press for additional capital funds and, during in-year monitoring rounds, I look forward to receiving support from all parties and Members. If we are serious about renewing the fabric of the schools estate and if we want to build a new Castle Tower School and other schools that badly need to be built throughout the North to allow our young people to access their education in modern, fit-for-purpose

accommodation, we must ensure that capital funding for the schools estate is a top priority, even in this challenging financial environment.

I emphasise that my review of all capital projects has been commissioned to ensure that the right size and type of school is built in the right location. The review is to ensure that all proposed capital projects are sustainable in the long term and adhere to our statutory duties. The rate at which the Department can build new schools is a separate issue and, as I said earlier, is totally dependent on the available resources. Finance is limited and, inevitably, it will continue to be limited unless there is a real commitment from the Executive and the Assembly to prioritise investment in the schools estate.

Cé gur maith áta a fhios agam na fadhbanna atá ag Castle Tower School, agus atá ag mórán scoileanna eile i ngach earnáil, ní fhéadaim tiomantas a thabhairt tús a chur le hobair ar an suíomh ná dearbhuithe a thabhairt faoi dhul chun cinn aon tionscadail olluibreacha ar leith mar gheall ar na dúshláin sin.

Those challenges are why, despite being acutely aware of the problems at Castle Tower Special School and many other schools in every sector, I cannot give a commitment at this point to work beginning on site or assurances about the progress of any particular major works project. As Minister of Education, I aim to put the interests of children and young people at the centre of my considerations. I assure Members that I will work with my Executive colleagues to secure the best outcome possible.

I conclude by emphasising my Department's commitment to children with special educational needs. In 2008-09, some £202 million was spent on provision for children with special educational needs.

Faoi dheireadh thiar, geallaim don Tionól go bhfuil mé an-tiomanta do dhul i ngleic leis an éagsúlacht atá ag dul i méid inár scoileanna, do bhacainní ar fhoghlaim a shárú, agus do chaighdeán a ardú le haghaidh gach páiste agus gach duine óg.

I assure the Assembly that I am deeply committed to addressing the growing diversity in our schools, removing barriers to learning and raising standards for all children and young people.

Adjourned at 4.12 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Oideachas

Suíomh Gréasáin Acmhainní Múinteora Sparklebox

*Arna fhoilsiú ag meán lae
Dé Máirt 4 Bealtaine 2010*

An tAire Oideachais (Ms Ruane): Beidh a fhios agaibh gur thug mé ráiteas don tionól ar an 8ú Feabhra 2010 faoin suíomh Gréasáin Acmhainní Múinteora Sparklebox. Ag an am sin, chuir mé in iúl do chomhaltaí go raibh inní orm faoi scoileanna ag úsáid an tsuímh Gréasáin Sparklebox, cionn is gur cuireadh an t-iarúinéir agus oibreoir i bpríosún ar 8ú Eanáir 2010 as íomhánna míghnéasacha de pháistí a bheith ina sheilbh agus á ndéanamh aige. Bhí sé cláraithe mar chiontóir gnéis agus ciontaíodh é cheana féin sa bhliain 2005. Chruthaigh sé an suíomh Gréasáin Sparklebox i mí Feabhra 2006 le hacmhainní in-íoslódáilte teagaisc a chur ar fáil saor in aisce. Bhí fáil ag scoileanna air trína gcórais C2k (soláthraíonn C2k seirbhís bhainistithe ICT do gach scoil anseo).

B'ábhar mór inní dom gur chuala C2k faoi chás Sparklebox den chéad uair i mí na Nollag, ach níor chuir siad bac le rochtain ar an suíomh Gréasáin ar líonra na scoileanna go dtí 1ú Feabhra. Dhírigh Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste aird mo Roinne ar an cheist Déardaoin 28ú Eanáir, agus d'inis an Roinn dom Dé hAoine 29ú Eanáir. Chreid mé, agus creidim go fóill, gur chóir gur insíodh dom i bhfad níos luaithe. Cé is moite de cheist an ama, bhí mé ag iarraidh a chinntiú nach raibh an suíomh ina bhaol do pháistí.

Education

Sparklebox Teacher Resource Website

*Published at noon on
Tuesday 4 May 2010*

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): You will recall that on 8th February 2010 I made a statement to the Assembly about the Sparklebox Teacher Resource website. At that time I informed Members that I had concerns about use of the Sparklebox website by schools, as the former owner and operator had been jailed on 8th January 2010 for making and possessing indecent images of children. He was a registered sex offender, having previously been convicted in 2005. The Sparklebox website was created by him in February 2006 to provide free downloadable teaching resources. It was available to schools via their C2k systems (C2k provides a managed ICT service to all schools here).

I was greatly concerned to learn that C2k first knew about the Sparklebox issue in December, but did not block access to the website on the schools network until 1st February. The Belfast Education and Library Board brought the matter to my Department's attention on Thursday 28th January, and the Department informed me on Friday 29th January. It was, and still is my view, that I should have been informed much earlier. Beyond the timing issue, I was anxious to confirm that the site posed no threat to children.

Nuair a labhair mé libh i mí Feabhra dúirt mé go raibh mé ag iarraidh bheith cinnte de go mbeadh freagairtí ar chúinsí áirithe chás Sparklebox comhréireach agus tráthúil. D'ordaigh mé don Roinn dhá rud a dhéanamh. Ar an chéad dul síos, d'iarr mé orthu scríobh chuig Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair, ag éileamh air iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar an dóigh ar láimhseáil C2k an cás agus moltaí a dhéanamh. Chomh maith leis sin, d'iarr mé ar an Roinn athbhreithniú a dhéanamh lena dhearbhuí cé acu a bhí a gcuid nósanna imeachta agus prótacal inmheánach féin láidir go leor.

Tá an dá athbhreithniú faighte agam agus chinntigh mé gur cuireadh cóipeanna díobh i Leabharlann an Tionóil agus ar shuíomh Gréasáin na Roinne. Ba mhian liom na príomhcheistanna a sainaitníodh sa dá athbhreithniú a lua agus cuntas a thabhairt ar na bearta ba mhian liom a bheith i bhfeidhm le sábháilteacht na bpáistí inár scoileanna a chinntiú.

Is léir ó thuairisc Bhord an Iarthair go ndearna C2k measúnuithe ar shuíomh Gréasáin Sparklebox i mí na Nollag, nuair a cuireadh ciontú an úinéara in iúl dóibh agus ag an am sin, fuair siad nach raibh an suíomh ina bhaol do pháistí.

Is tábhachtach a thabhairt faoi deara gur cuireadh bac leis na codanna idirghníomhacha den suíomh trí líonra na scoileanna agus gur thug an suíomh rochtain ar acmhainní a bhí úsáideach do – agus a bhí in úsáid go forleathan ag – scoileanna. Ba é an cheist a bhí ann ná oiriúnacht rochtain leanúnach scoileanna ar shuíomh Gréasáin ar le duine é ar ciontaíodh as coir in aghaidh páistí é. Nuair a rinne C2k measúnú ar an suíomh agus nuair a mheas siad é a bheith oiriúnach do rochtain leanúnach scoileanna, bhí fócas acu ar ábhar an tsuímh. Coinnigh C2k an suíomh faoi athbhreithniú.

Aithníonn an tuairisc saincheistanna a bhain le heolas a chomhroinnt le C2k agus moltar go ndéanann na comhlachais ábhartha in Éirinn nó sa Bhreatain athbhreithniú ar na socruithe reatha do thuairisciú agus do shreabhadh eolais ó agus chuig an Regional Broadband Consortia. Tacaím go hiomlán leis an mholadh seo nó tá mé cinnte dearfa de go bhfuil gá le feabhsú sa réimse seo.

When I came before you in February I said that I needed to be assured that responses to the particular situation surrounding Sparklebox were proportionate and timely. I instructed my Department to do two things. First, to write to the Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board, requiring him to investigate the manner in which the situation was handled by C2k and to make recommendations. Second, I wished the Department to carry out a review to determine if its own internal procedures and protocols were sufficiently robust.

I have now received both reviews and I have ensured that copies have been placed in the Assembly Library and on the Department's website. I now wish to detail the key issues identified by both reviews and to outline the actions that I want to see taken to ensure the safety of children within our schools.

It is clear from the Western Board report that C2k conducted assessments of the Sparklebox website in December, when it was notified of the then owner's conviction and at that time found that the site posed no risk to children.

It is important to note that the interactive parts of the site were blocked via the schools' network and that the site did provide access to resources that were of use to – and widely used by – schools. The question to be addressed was rather the appropriateness of continued access by schools to a website owned by a person who had been convicted of a crime against children. When C2k assessed the site and considered it to be suitable for continued access by schools, its focus was on content. C2k continued to keep the site under review.

The report points up issues around the sharing of information with C2k and recommends that the relevant bodies in Ireland and Britain conduct a review of current arrangements for the reporting and flow of information from and to the Regional Broadband Consortia. I fully endorse this recommendation as I am convinced that there is a need for improvement in this area.

Go deimhin, sula bhfuair mé tuairisc Bhord an Iarthair, scríobh mé chuig mo chomhghleacaithe i ndeisceart na hÉireann, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, ag iarraidh orthu beart a ghlacadh le córais níos fearr a chur i bhfeidhm a chinnteoidh go nglacfar beart lena chur in iúl d'údaráis ábhartha chomh luath is a chiontaítear duine as cionta ábhartha. Glacadh rófhada gur cuireadh na ceisteanna faoi úinéir Sparklebox in iúl do C2k. Beidh mé ag iarraidh tacaíocht ó mo chomhghleacaithe sa Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, go háirithe ón Aire Sláinte agus ón Aire Cirt, le brú ar aghaidh le heolas a chomhroinnt ar bhealach níos fearr, a chuideoidh lenár gcuid páistí a chosaint.

Tá mé diongbháilte de go ndéanfaidh mo roinn féin a seacht ndícheall i dtaca le soiléire a thabhairt sa chumarsáid a dhéanann siad le scoileanna agus leis na comhlachais a thacaíonn leo. Mar sin de, eiseoidh muid treoir shoiléir agus prótacail shoiléire maidir le húsáid ábhar agus acmhainní sa seomra ranga ó shuíomhanna Gréasáin ar chuir C2k bac leo.

Ardaítear roinnt ceisteanna níos forleithne in athbhreithniú Bhord an Iarthair fosta, amhail an gá le straitéis chumarsáide a shonraíonn meicníocht réasúnta phraiticiúil tuairiscithe le haghaidh ceisteanna cosanta páistí chuig DE. Beidh mo chuid oifigeach ag oibriú le comhghleacaithe i Ranna agus in eagraíochtaí eile le teacht ar an bhealach is fearr chun tosaigh maidir leis na ceisteanna níos forleithne seo.

Beidh Bord an Iarthair ag éileamh ar C2k athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar a nósanna imeachta caighdeánacha oibrithe agus measúnaithe le déileáil le ceisteanna, ceisteanna cosanta páistí san áireamh, nach bhfuil mar chuid de ghnáthphróisis fhormhéadaithe C2k. Forbróidh an t-athbhreithniú seo nósanna imeachta soiléire ar an bhealach ar chóir do C2k dul i mbun cúrsaí bainistithe, comhairlithe agus cumarsáide, lena n-áirítear ceanglas gur chóir do Bhord Bainistíochta C2k comhairle a lorg ó na húdaráis ábhartha láithreach.

Indeed, in advance of taking receipt of the Western Board report, I had already written to my counterparts in the south of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, calling for action to be taken to put in place better systems for ensuring that action is taken to inform relevant authorities as soon as someone is charged with relevant offences. It took too long for C2k to be notified of the issues surrounding Sparklebox's owner. I will be looking to my Executive colleagues, in particular the Health Minister and the Justice Minister, for support in continuing to push for better sharing of information that can help protect our children.

I am also determined that my own department will not be found wanting in the clarity of its communication with schools and the bodies that support them. We will therefore issue very clear guidance and protocols regarding the use in the classroom of materials and resources which have originated from websites blocked by C2k.

There are also some wider issues highlighted in the Western Board review, such as the need to develop a communications strategy detailing a sensible and practical reporting mechanism for child protection issues to DE. My officials will be working with colleagues in other Departments and organisations to chart the best way forward regarding these wider issues.

The Western Board will also require C2k to review its standard operating and assessment procedures to deal with issues, including child protection issues, which lie outside C2k's normal escalation processes. This review will develop clear procedures on how C2k should manage, consult and communicate, including a requirement that the C2k Management Board should seek immediate advice from the appropriate authorities.

Tá mé den tuairim gur chóir gur cuireadh in iúl don Roinn, agus domsa mar Aire, faoin cheist seo agus faoi na bearta réamhchúraim atá á nglacadh i bhfad níos luaithe ná mar ar cuireadh. Ní mór dúinn uile foghlaim ón eispéireas seo agus tá mé ag cur in iúl go soiléir go bhfuil mé ag dúil leis go dtabharfaidh gach eagraíocht a bhfuil baint acu le cúrsaí oideachais le fios don Roinn láithreach nuair a thagann aon cheisteanna nó ábhair imní chun solais a d'fhéadfaí tionchar réigiúnach bheith acu.

Ba mhaith liom díriú anois ar an athbhreithniú ar bhearta mo Roinne féin agus iad ag láimhseáil an eolais a fuair siad faoi Sparklebox. Rinneadh an t-athbhreithniú seo faoi stiúradh na Foirne Iniúchóireachta Inmheánaí.

Thaispeáin an t-athbhreithniú gur ghníomhaigh an Roinn go luath leis an chás a shoiléiriú agus gur ghlac siad bearta cuí a luaithe is a rinne Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste teagmháil leo Déardaoin an 28ú Eanáir. Tá an Fhoireann Athbhreithnithe sásta go bhfuil an struchtúr sa Roinn le haghaidh soiléire ról agus freagrachtaí a chinntiú i gcúrsaí cumhdaigh, go bhfuil sé éifeachtach agus gur fheidhmigh sé go maith sa chás seo.

Freagróidh mé ar ball do Bhord an Iarthair faoina n-athbhreithniú agus beidh mé ag amharc ar an chás lena chinntiú go gcuirfear na moltaí ar fad i bhfeidhm. Chuige sin beidh mé ag iarraidh an t-eolas is déanaí ar an dul chun cinn a fháil ó mo Roinn ar bhonn rialta.

Ba mhaith liom a shonrú go soiléir – níl aon amhras ann ach go gcuireann ICT deiseanna iontacha ar fáil do dhaoine óga lena bheith ag foghlaim agus le sult a bhaint as an fhoghlaim. Is mar gheall air sin go bhfuil úsáid ICT ina croíchuid den churaclam athbhreithnithe agus tá fócas againn ar thacaíocht do dhaltaí lena scileanna ICT a fhorbairt.

Caithfidh muid iad a choinneáil slán ó gach dochar agus iad ag foghlaim. Beidh sé mar phríomhthosaíocht againn i gcónaí sábháilteacht agus leas na bpáistí agus na ndaoine óga a chinntiú, mar aon leis an tacaíocht a thugann muid do na múinteoirí agus ceannairí scoile agus iad ag oibriú leis na páistí agus na daoine óga a choinneáil slán.

I take the view that the Department, and I as Minister, should have been informed at a much earlier date about this issue and about the precautionary measures being taken. We must all learn from this experience and I am making clear my expectation that all education partners will advise the Department immediately when any issue or concern arises which may have a regional impact.

I want to turn now to the review of my own Department's actions in handling the information it received about Sparklebox. This review was carried out under the supervision of its Internal Audit Team.

The review indicated that when the Department was contacted by Belfast Education and Library Board on Thursday 28th January, it moved quickly to clarify the position and to take appropriate action. The Review Team is satisfied that the structure within the Department for ensuring clarity about roles and responsibilities in safeguarding matters is effective and worked well in the situation.

I will respond shortly to the Western Board about its review and I will be taking an active interest in the implementation of all of the recommendations. To this end I will be seeking regular updates from my Department on how matters are progressing.

Let me be clear – there is no doubt that ICT provides our young people with wonderful opportunities to learn and to enjoy learning. For that reason the use of ICT is a core part of our revised curriculum and our focus is on supporting pupils to develop their ICT skills.

We must also, however, keep them safe from harm while they learn. For me the key priority will always be the safety and wellbeing of our children and young people, and the support we provide to their teachers and school leaders in working to keep them safe.

Le gach rud atá foghlamtha againn ón chás seo agus na bearta atá glactha agam le baol an atarlaithe a ísliú, creidim go gcuirfidh an cás seo le cumas na múinteoirí chun páistí a choinneáil slán agus iad ag úsáid an idirlín ar scoil.

What has been learned from this situation and the steps I have taken to minimise the risk of recurrence will, I believe, make a real contribution to helping our teachers and to keeping our children safe when they are on-line in school.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the Economic Downturn

Published at 9.30 am on Thursday 20 May 2010

The First Minister and the deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness):

In December 2008 we presented to the Assembly the Executive's consolidated package of measures to deal with the economic downturn. As part of that December package, we established the Cross Sector Advisory Forum (CSAF) to continue our dialogue with business, trade unions, financial institutions, consumer organisations and voluntary and community stakeholders.

The Forum held four meetings on 6 April 2009, 30 June 2009, 7 October 2009, and finally on 4 March 2010. It formed sub-groups to take forward particular strands of work and their recommendations were submitted to us for consideration in November 2009.

In parallel with this work, the Economic Development Forum also submitted recommendations specifically aimed at helping the local economy recover from the recession. We were also able to draw upon recommendations made by NICS Departments to contribute to economic recovery.

All of these measures are included in the paper: "The Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the Economic Downturn". This package of measures was approved by the Executive on 25 March and forms the next steps in our work to address the economic downturn.

The actions cover wide ranging issues such as planning, availability of bank finance, export promotion, R&D support, implementation of MATRIX, skills and employment measures, benefit uptake, promoting renewables, the social economy, illegal money lending, benefit uptake, small business access to procurement projects, money guidance rollout, development of the gas industry and energy efficiency.

Many of the proposals can be implemented readily and others are for further consideration with the priority being to have a strong impact on jobs, business growth and alleviating hardship and effectively respond to the issues raised by the crisis.

Full details of the recovery package can be found in the booklet posted in the Assembly Library and on the Cross Sector Advisory Forum section on the OFMDFM website:

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/economic-policy/cross_sector_advisory_forum.htm.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

19 May 2010

Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA 6/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Allan Bresland
Mr Willie Clarke
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr George Robinson

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss McIlveen):

We turn to the Committee's clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. I draw members' attention to the text of the two amendments to the Bill that were drafted in response to suggestions from the Committee and agreed by the Department. Those amendments may be discussed in more detail during this item of business.

This part of the meeting is being reported by Hansard for inclusion in the Committee's report. I remind members to ensure that mobile phones are switched off because they interfere with the audio recording.

This is an opportunity for the Committee to consider the Bill, clause by clause, in advance of considering the second draft of our report at our meeting on 26 May 2010. Are members content that we deal with the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: If, at any stage during this process, members are not content, we can revisit any clause at next week's meeting. I draw members' attention to the Bill, a copy of which is included in the meeting packs. The

Bill comprises 10 clauses, and there are three schedules.

Part 1 of the Bill, comprising clauses 1 to 5, deals with permit schemes. Part 2 of the Bill, which comprises clauses 6 and 7, deals with miscellaneous issues that include the holding of inquiries by the Department, as well as prohibition and restriction in respect of public road use in connection with special events — as does schedule 1. Part 3, and schedules 1 to 3, deal with amendments and repeals in respect of previous legislation, as well as when the Bill will come into operation.

I remind members that, throughout the Committee Stage of the Bill, the information that was gathered, the evidence that was provided, the discussions that took place, and the consideration of the first draft of the Committee's report have been structured to reflect the structure of the Bill and the content of each of the clauses and schedules.

Are members content to deal with each of the 10 clauses and three schedules in turn?

Members indicated assent.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Permit regulations)

The Deputy Chairperson: I beg to move

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 4, line 4, leave out subsection (10) and insert

“(10) No regulations to which this subsection applies shall be made unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.

(10A) Subsection (10) applies to —

the first regulations under this section;

regulations under this section containing any provision which creates a criminal offence or increases a penalty for an existing offence.”

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 3, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clauses 4 to 10 agreed to.

Schedule 1 (Schedule to be inserted as Schedule 3A to the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997)

The Deputy Chairperson: I beg to move

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the schedule be amended as follows: In page 7, line 13 at end insert

“and for the purpose of this paragraph ‘film’ includes a recording on any medium from which a moving image may by any means be produced.”

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the Committee’s proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Schedule 1, subject to the Committee’s proposed amendment, agreed to.

Schedules 2 to 3 agreed to.

The Deputy Chairperson: Are members content that the decisions that have been taken today be reflected in the revised version of the report, which will be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 26 May 2010?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: Are members content for the Committee office to take forward the collation of information for inclusion in the appendices to the report? That information will all have been before the Committee during the Committee Stage of the Bill, and it is extremely lengthy. Are members happy that we do that?

Members indicated assent.

Mr I McCrea: I would not say that I am overly happy, but we have to do it.

The Deputy Chairperson: Are members agreed that, because the full report and the appendices will be an extremely large document, the appendices should be produced on CD-ROM and included with the report, rather than printed in full?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Social Development

20 May 2010

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Simon Hamilton (Chairperson)
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Billy Armstrong
Mrs Mary Bradley
Mr Mickey Brady
Mr Jonathan Craig
Mr Alex Easton
Mr David Hilditch
Ms Anna Lo
Mr Fra McCann

Witnesses:

Ms Elaine Campbell	Age NI
Ms Amy Veale	
Ms Anne McCleary	Department for Social Development
Mr Colm McLaughlin	
Ms Margaret Sisk	

The Chairperson (Mr Hamilton): I welcome Ms Elaine Campbell, who is head of policy in Age NI, and Ms Amy Veale, Age NI's policy officer. The evidence session will be recorded by Hansard for inclusion in the Committee's report. Elaine and Amy, I invite you to give a brief overview of the pertinent issues in your written submission, after which Committee members will have an opportunity to ask questions.

Ms Elaine Campbell (Age NI): We understand that time is limited, so we will restrict our comments to two areas. Amy will address the issue of pilot schemes in a clause that is missing from Northern Ireland's Welfare Reform Bill, and I will talk about conditionality.

Ms Amy Veale (Age NI): As is outlined in our written briefing, the Welfare Reform Act 2009

contains a section that allows the automatic payment of pension credit for a pilot period in GB. Northern Ireland's Welfare Reform Bill does not contain a similar clause, meaning that a pilot exercise will not be carried out here. We urge the Committee to press for the inclusion of such a clause, because we have a number of concerns about its absence from the Bill. We already know that pensioner poverty levels are higher in Northern Ireland. The absence of, or failure to include, a clause in the Welfare Reform Bill that is similar to section 27 of the 2009 Act could contribute to the growing inequality between older people in Northern Ireland and those in GB.

There are two main reasons for that. First, the failure to carry out a pilot scheme here will waste an opportunity to narrow the aforementioned poverty gap. We all know that benefit-uptake initiatives here have had limited success, and up to 51% of older people are not claiming pension credit. Our research shows that 29% do not know what benefits are available to them. We need to be proactive in looking at other ways in which to get older people to claim. We have said that, and we continue to say that. A pilot exercise would present an ideal opportunity to be innovative.

Secondly, a key objective of the pilot scheme in GB is to establish how administration of automatic payments would work. It is a learning exercise that is specific to GB. We have a separate administration system here, so a separate pilot needs to be carried out to establish how automatic payments would work in Northern Ireland. Failure to conduct a pilot here could result in pension credit automatic payments being rolled out in GB and not in Northern Ireland. We are concerned that the introduction of automatic payments in Northern Ireland would be significantly delayed, as we would not have tested how such a system could work in Northern Ireland, and the poverty gap, which is already big, could widen.

Government strategies such as 'Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland' and 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society: Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People', and even the Programme for Government, recognise and articulate the need to address pensioner poverty here. We think that the Bill provides an ideal opportunity to do that, and we do not want to waste that opportunity.

Ms E Campbell: It is inappropriate to introduce a conditionality test for over-50s for a number of reasons. First, in the current economic climate, not enough jobs are available. There is insufficient back-to-work support for over-50s, and insufficient training that focuses specifically on older people's employment needs is available for personal employment advisers. Those issues are already a concern for older people. Introducing conditionality will make that situation worse.

We already know that, when they drop out of the labour market, over-50s are much more likely to stay unemployed for a longer period. Introducing conditions could make people feel as though they are being further punished for a situation that is largely out of their control.

I know that this is outwith the scope of the Welfare Reform Bill, but another issue is that the default retirement age is still 65. On the one hand, over-50s are out of work but are, I hope, being helped into the labour market, yet, on the other hand, we find that age discrimination in employment is still rife. Until employers begin to hire older workers, led by a government ban on the default retirement age, older workers will be stuck in a situation in which they are being pushed into employment by government but pushed back out by employers who do not necessarily want to take them on. I wanted to raise that as an issue, because it does have an impact on the Bill's potential success.

Rather than focus on punitive measures that may stigmatise people who are already experiencing significant difficulties, there must be a focus on what is needed to help over-50s obtain employment.

I will speak very briefly about the success of programmes such as New Deal. Over-50s are not being well served by such programmes. Around 71% of older people on New Deal went back to benefits immediately. That is a really high percentage, particularly when contrasted with other age groups. The figure was around 54% for people aged between 40 and 49, and 47% for people aged between 30 and 39. The situation as it stands is not working well for older people.

There is also a skills gap among older workers. Oxford Economics conducted a big piece of research into what jobs are coming up, how many there are likely to be, and what skills are needed. As the number of workforce jobs

increases, it seems that people are required to have higher-level qualifications, such as NVQ level 4 and higher. Older people are less likely to hold those qualifications. The economy is graduate-hungry, and older workers are not filling the skills gap. Therefore, instead of putting resources into back-to-work-focused interviews, resources should perhaps go into looking into how to upskill the older workforce.

On the basis of research that Oxford Economics carried out, the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) stated:

"we envisage a bleak future for the currently unemployed and inactive aged over 50",

and that is without the increased conditionality. If their future is indeed bleak, how will work-focused interviews assist people? Will it point out facts that are already known, such as the fact that older workers do not have the skills to go into employment? How will work-focused interviews operate in order to help older workers to obtain and sustain employment? From our perspective, we do not see work-focused interviews as being a workable solution.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) carried out work that concluded that there should be greater focus on the older participants' requirements in New Deal. I realise that New Deal is not necessarily your primary concern. However, considerable scope exists for working across Departments to determine the best ways in which to get people who are over 50 years of age back into employment, rather than simply to tell them what will happen if they do not get back into employment.

Therefore, we advise strongly against any sanctions being applied until the three key points that I mentioned at the beginning are met, which are that the economy improve to such a degree that it is likely that people will be able to obtain jobs; that better back-to-work support be provided, which can be done through the Department for Social Development (DSD); and, especially important, that improved training for personal employment advisers be provided. When people first become unemployed is the critical period in which they need help to get back to work. The longer that they are out of work, the longer that they are likely to stay out of work. We all hope that that does not happen. That is it from us. We are happy to take questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you for focusing on those issues. I appreciate that. Certainly, I understand Age NI's perspective, which is from that of older people, who find it difficult to get back to work. Sometimes, I find myself in the position in which I sound as though I am a spokesman for the Department. I shudder at the thought. You made a point about conditionality, which I understand entirely. I guess that it might be frustrating for people who are over 50 years of age to be going to work-focused interviews repetitively when they feel that there is a dearth of employment generally and a dearth of suitable employment for them. They may not have the skills that employers seek or are at an age at which they do not want to go back to work anyway.

A considerable number of people over 50 would go through work-focused interviews not weekly but more sporadically. Would that not assist, and enhance opportunities for, those who want to go back to work, through focusing their mind on what they should do and through signposting them in different directions, such as towards skills training or employability training? That might improve their position from one of being out of work to one of being on the path back to work.

Ms E Campbell: It could, but not necessarily. If work-focused interviews are seen as a punitive measure, they will not be perceived as something that will work for people. If people are told that they must show up for work-focused interviews or else, only for them to go to those interviews and be told that, yes, they are quite right to think that they do not possess sufficient skills, or if people go to interviews and find them not to be useful, they will not benefit.

From our perspective, advisers must be trained in the needs of older people. You said that people might not want to find employment. They might or they might not. Having spoken to employers, we have learnt that they do not want to take on older workers. Such age discrimination occurs in employers' perceptions of older people. We do not want them to give up on older people, nor do we want older people to give up on themselves. However, we do not believe that the work-focused interview is necessarily the right starting point. We need to consider how to assist older people to help themselves acquire the necessary skills. If work-focused interviews are seen as a punitive measure, they will not be useful to anyone.

The Chairperson: It is the nature and style of them rather than the encouragement and assistance offered that you believe could be perceived as being punitive.

Ms E Campbell: It very much depends on how work-focused interviews are carried out in practice and how people perceive the help that is offered at job centres. Staff attitudes are not always as enlightened as we would like them to be, particularly where older workers are concerned, and the stigmatising influence can have a detrimental effect on people.

Mr Easton: We are told that it will be a breach of parity if we go against the Bill, but is it not a breach of parity if we do not have a pilot scheme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: He is right.

The Chairperson: Alex is always right.

Mr Easton: I wish that my wife would tell me that. *[Laughter.]*

The rest of the UK is having a pilot scheme. If our not going along with the Bill is cited as a breach of parity, I cite the lack of a pilot scheme as a breach of parity. We should have a pilot scheme.

The Chairperson: You are inviting me to be a departmental spokesman again.

Mr Easton: It is one area of the Bill that we may be able to work around.

The Chairperson: Departmental officials will be along later for clause-by-clause scrutiny. I encourage members to raise all those issues and seek assurances at that stage. The argument may be that it is a pilot scheme, as opposed to the level of payment or conditions. However, I understand your point, and we will raise it later.

Ms Lo: At one of last week's meetings, we said that we should have a pilot for the "work for your benefit" scheme. That supports Alex's point.

The Chairperson: Yes; the Bill certainly contains the power to have that pilot.

Mr Brady: Thanks very much for your presentation. To follow on from Alex's point, parity seems to be a one-way street in the North, because we have almost to ape what happens in Britain.

It is accepted that pension credit is the benefit that is not taken up by the majority of people who should be getting it. Between £1 million

and £1.9 million goes directly back to the Treasury every week. A great deal of money has been spent on a number benefit-uptake initiatives — if that is the right word — but, as you said, most of them have been ineffective. Now seems an ideal opportunity to balance things out and have a pilot scheme that targets those most in need. I cannot imagine that it will cost much more to initiate a pilot scheme than what has been spent on failed uptake schemes and on the contracts that have been issued to various bodies.

Many of the schemes, such as New Deal, are predicated on the fact that many young people will take them up. We were told that 411 people in our area would be eligible, but it worked out that only around 35 people benefited. No one is denying that the majority of people want to work. However, the problem with sending people who are over 50 years of age to work-based interviews is that it raises expectations that will not be fulfilled. You rightly made the point that people who are over 50 have big difficulties getting employment in the current economic climate, and that would be the case even if the economic situation were not as bad.

Last year, an individual who had worked for a firm for something like 36 years but had now been made redundant came into see me. That person was 51 or 52 and, at the last count, had attended something like 49 unsuccessful interviews. That is somebody who wanted to work and who used initiative to try to do so. On balance, people are going through skills assessments who are having their expectations raised but not fulfilled.

You are absolutely right in what you say. It goes back to the issue of parity: there needs to be some balance. It seems that every time that we find an innovative initiative, we are told that it cannot happen. I believe that parity is all about money and the subvention. We could have a better scheme here without its necessarily costing any more money, and surely that is the issue. If, God forbid, we breached parity, the Treasury would come over here with a hacksaw and cut us off, and we would drift off into the Atlantic. That seems to be the notion. If the money is not going to be affected adversely, there is no reason that we cannot be innovative. What are your views on that?

Ms E Campbell: Work-focused interviews have resource implications. If scarce resources

are becoming scarcer, will staff be taken off whatever they are doing at that moment to carry out the interviews? Obviously, we do not have the finer detail, but that would take resources away from existing work. The idea sounds OK, but the practical application of that and other ideas for resource allocation and outcomes must be considered.

Mr Brady: All those ideas sound good in an ideal world, but, given the present climate in which unemployed people must look for jobs, we certainly do not live in one.

No big effort has been made to ensure that the people who should receive pension credit do so. Lip service has been paid to take-up campaigns, and we constantly hear that the Minister has initiating a take-up campaign, but none of those campaigns really works.

Ms E Campbell: Age NI has participated in benefit-uptake campaigns that have provided some benefit. Nevertheless, you are right about them. There are other factors at work in the take-up of benefits. For example, some people believe that there is a stigma attached to taking up benefits, and that is an extremely difficult belief to break. I agree that benefit-uptake campaigns have not been as successful as they might be.

Mr Brady: In fairness, I am sure that Age NI's campaign was more than successful. However, the organisation had limited resources and can contact only so many people. The campaigns target chunks of pensioners who may or may not qualify instead of those who actually qualify. That is a bitty approach.

Ms Veale: A major part of the barrier to pension credit uptake is the stigma that is attached to whole process of applying for it and the filling in of forms. Automatic payments would overcome that barrier to a large degree. The wording of section 27 in the UK Act makes provision for targeting either a sample of older people or a specific group. We, therefore, propose to use that pilot as an innovative way in which to get people to take up pension credit. Single women over 70 could be targeted, because they have the highest levels of pensioner poverty. It would not cost that much to do that.

Mr Brady: In European countries, and particularly in Scandinavia, people automatically receive pension credit when they reach pension age. They do not even have to apply for it. There is

absolutely no reason that that could not be considered here. That system is more cost-effective, because the information is already on the computer, so people do not have to go through the rigmarole of applying and making calls. It obviously has much to do with data and information being released under freedom of information legislation. Other countries seem to have a more effective scheme than Britain, which has the meanest pension award in the entire developed world.

Ms Veale: As you say, Mickey, the money spent on benefit-uptake initiatives could be spent on something innovative and new. This is our chance to do that. If a clause that mirrors section 27 in the UK Act is not included, that chance is gone, so we should get it in the Bill.

The Chairperson: Do any other members wish to ask a question? As we move to the next phase of the scrutiny of the Bill, we will certainly raise all the issues with the Department and seek assurance or clarity on possible change.

Ms E Campbell: Will it change?

The Chairperson: I always qualify the change with the word “possible”, because of the nature of the process.

Thank you very much for coming along and giving your evidence today, particularly at such short notice. We are grateful for that. It is the first time we have had Age NI before us. I am sure that your organisation will be vital to us in a lot of the work we do, and I am sure that we will see you again soon.

Ms E Campbell: Yes, definitely. Thank you.

Mr Brady: For some of us it is becoming more and more relevant.

The Chairperson: When we hear about over-50s and work-focused interviews, people here get nervous.

That concludes our evidence sessions on the Welfare Reform Bill. Are members happy to conclude taking evidence and to proceed with clause-by-clause scrutiny? Perhaps “happy” is the wrong word.

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Committee Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill commenced, as you all know, on 22 April. The Committee has received 20 written responses on the Bill. It has considered

oral evidence from seven key stakeholder organisations, plus the Department. Given the Committee’s extensive consideration of evidence and responses from the Department, it was agreed that formal clause-by-clause scrutiny should commence today.

Members have previously set out their interim positions on the clauses of the Bill. I advise members that, during the clause-by-clause scrutiny, they will be asked to set out their final positions in respect of the clauses of the Bill, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report and consequential amendments. Where the majority of Committee members support an amendment, the Committee Clerk and the Bill Clerk will take away the proposal and draft the appropriate wording for consideration at a subsequent meeting. Where members do not feel that they are able to agree a clause, that must be clearly stated during the clause-by-clause scrutiny. In such cases, members will be asked to set out their proposed amendment, and consideration of the clause in question may be deferred until the next meeting.

The Department has not suggested any amendments to the Bill. To speed up the process and answer any queries, the Department has been invited to attend the clause-by-clause scrutiny. We welcome Anne McCleary, Margaret Sisk, and Colm McLaughlin. Responses to the Committee’s queries from the Department, the Employment and Learning Committee and the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have been tabled, as have the Department’s notes from the meeting on 18 May.

Before we begin, I wish to refresh everyone’s memory of a key point in the last evidence session which might assist us in getting through some of those items. We seek assurance from the Department, in respect of all the clauses of the Bill, that it will revise its and the Department for Employment and Learning’s guidance to benefit advisers, requiring them to give additional consideration to claimants who have childcare difficulties, mental illness, learning disability, domestic violence issues or other caring responsibilities.

Ms Margaret Sisk (Department for Social Development): Yes.

Ms Anne McCleary (Department for Social Development): Yes.

The Chairperson: That may assist us in moving this along. I also seek agreement from the Department that this assurance will be repeated at Consideration Stage of the Bill by the Minister.

Ms Sisk: Yes.

Ms McCleary: Yes.

The Chairperson: There is a lot of paper involved in all of this. Members have a clause-by-clause table which the Committee Clerk has helpfully provided. We will start at the beginning and go through all 35 clauses.

Clause 1 (Schemes for assisting persons to obtain employment: “work for your benefit” schemes etc.)

The Chairperson: Clause 1 introduces mandatory “work for your benefit” schemes for jobseeker’s allowance (JSA) claimants. The Department advises that the policy intention is to target those schemes and provide intensive support for the long-term unemployed. The Department indicates that the schemes are to be piloted in Great Britain, and that regulations prescribing the nature of the schemes will be subject to negative resolution by the Assembly. The Committee has been advised that the schemes will form part of the UK social security system. As such, a decision not to implement them in Northern Ireland would represent a breach of parity in social security matters.

Stakeholders have indicated numerous concerns and suggested changes, including a requirement to pay participants the minimum wage, exemptions for lone parents and claimants with mental or physical disability, guarantees that participants will be facilitated to undertake other training courses, a sunset clause, and a Northern Ireland pilot version of the scheme.

I refer Members to suggested amendments A to M in our table. I will begin by asking the Department whether it has anything to add to its evidence on the clause. We have heard a lot about the pilot schemes in GB. Is there anything that you want to add at this stage?

Ms McCleary: No. The Committee has heard us talk on numerous occasions over the past couple of weeks about the importance of the pilot schemes, and that whatever happens in Northern Ireland will be determined by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and not necessarily take exactly the same

shape as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) schemes. There is flexibility there.

Ms Sisk: Amendment B suggests that the schemes should provide training and support. They will provide training and support; that is part of the scheme.

The Chairperson: The power is in the Bill to run NI pilot schemes, if deemed appropriate —

Ms Sisk: Yes, that is right.

The Chairperson: If the GB pilot schemes show anomalies that stick out like a sore thumb and maybe would not work in the same way in Northern Ireland, there is the power to do that.

Ms Sisk: Oh, yes. That will be up to DEL, and it has already indicated that it may well decide to run its own pilot schemes tailored to Northern Ireland. In the end, however, that decision will rest with DEL.

The Chairperson: That is conditional on resources.

Ms Sisk: Availability of resources is one of the big issues for DEL.

The Chairperson: Is the whole thing conditional on resources?

Ms Sisk: The introduction of the scheme is, yes. DEL has made it clear that a lot of the Bill has significant resource implications, because it requires an awful lot more work by personal advisers. Therefore, there will have to be a bid to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for additional administration funding. A lot will depend on the availability of resources.

Mr F McCann: It seems that we are near enough joined at the hip to DEL in much of this. Obviously, that is important. However, I always believed that the controlling Department was the Department for Social Development (DSD), and that any decisions to run pilot schemes would, therefore, come through DSD.

Ms Sisk: No. Our responsibility is to require people to attend schemes as a condition of the receipt of the benefit. However, if DEL does not run the scheme in the first place, we cannot put the requirement into place. The running of the scheme is the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning. The design of the scheme will also be for DEL.

Mr F McCann: Are you saying that, if the Committee asks you to go away and consider

introducing pilot schemes in a number of areas, you do not have the ability to do that or to instruct DEL to do that?

Ms Sisk: We cannot guarantee that that would happen. All we can say is that the power is in the Bill to run pilot schemes. Therefore, there is nothing to prevent them from happening. However, we cannot bind the Department for Employment and Learning to actually run pilot schemes. That would have to be taken up with them.

The Chairperson: The Committee Clerk is reminding me that in GB, DWP has both these roles, but here they are split.

Ms Sisk: That is correct.

Ms McCleary: There is a structural difference.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Therein lies the core of the problem. We have been given assurances that lone parents — I am not talking about this clause, just using it as an example by way of illustration — will not be penalised if they do not have childcare. This is buck-passing from one Department to another. If people cannot avail themselves of proper training, that may be one way out. However, if they cannot avail of the training that they feel is appropriate to them, then their benefit is at risk. Even before we know what the Tory cuts will be, DEL, like any other Department, is saying that there will be budgetary constraints. We have heard a presentation from Age NI about appropriate advice, training and support. Unless it is specified what that is, and it is actually clear and compulsory — or not even so much compulsory but that people fully understand what it is, and it is not related to budgets — this is totally ridiculous. It is forcing people out to work and giving them very little support, and having the audacity to ask them to work for their benefit.

Mr Brady: Resource implications were mentioned. Are we being told by DSD that for such a piece of legislation, which is probably the most major piece of legislation, in terms of its implications for social security, since the inception of the welfare state, proper resources and funding will not be put in place to implement it?

Ms Sisk: We are not saying that. When the pilots are put in place in GB, we will have the opportunity to see what type and level of resources are required to run the schemes. At that point, the Department for Employment and Learning, with us, will approach DFP

for resources. Nobody is saying that those resources will not be made available. However, we are saying that the running of the schemes is dependent on the resources being made available.

Mr Brady: Surely, from a logical point of view, those pilot schemes will be run, but the legislation will have been implemented already.

Ms Sisk: Yes.

Mr Brady: It will be too late.

Ms Sisk: The legislation puts in place the power for us to require people to attend those schemes should they be put in place. However, if no schemes are put in place, then people cannot be required to attend them. We are asking for the power to be put in place now so that, if the schemes are run, we can require people to attend them.

Mr Brady: But if the pilot schemes in England are not successful — if there are anomalies within them — then by the time it comes here it will be a fait accompli.

Ms Sisk: If the pilot schemes are not successful in Great Britain they will not be rolled out in Great Britain, and we will not have any schemes here.

Mr Brady: Yes, but the point that we have been trying to make is that there may be an area in Britain where the schemes could be successful, but that does not necessarily transfer to the North.

Ms Sisk: You are absolutely right. That is why we are saying that the design of the scheme in Northern Ireland will be specifically tailored to Northern Ireland.

Mr Brady: Why do we not have a pilot scheme to ensure that?

Ms Sisk: That is up to DEL. If DEL wants to run pilot schemes, it can. All we are saying is that we will have the power in the Bill for the pilot scheme to be run. If we do not put the power in the Bill to run pilot schemes, DEL cannot run them. That is why we need the power in the first place.

Mr Brady: When legislation was being introduced in 2008 around employment and support allowance (ESA), we wanted clause 16 to be deleted. It was to do with privatisation, and we were told that it would not happen so there was no need to delete it, but it has happened in

terms of medical support services. If you retain the power —

Ms Sisk: To run the schemes?

Mr Brady: In my experience, it will be implemented.

Ms Sisk: I will not say that it will or it will not. It depends on the success of the pilots in GB. If they are successful and they work well, and if DEL decides that it can run good schemes in Northern Ireland, clearly they will be set up. If not, they will not be set up.

Mr Brady: We could have successful schemes here, which would give a much better overview.

Ms Sisk: We could.

Ms McCleary: We could, and that might happen.

Ms Sisk: However, if we do not put the power in the Bill, then we cannot do it. We need the piloting power in the Bill: so that we can run separate Northern Ireland schemes.

Mr Brady: We are back to “may” and “shall”. We will be talking about how many angels we can balance on the point of a needle.

The Chairperson: Is that on our agenda? It may be under “Any other business”.

Ms Lo: I just want to clarify something before I comment. Does the first column of the table contain suggested amendments?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes.

The Chairperson: Those amendments flow from the various pieces of evidence that the Committee has received. It is literally everything that has been suggested as an amendment, so that the Committee has the fullness of what stakeholders are saying on this.

Ms Lo: So we are asking the Department to accept all those?

The Chairperson: No, we are not quite saying that. It is guidance for Committee members. That is what has been raised, and members may be interested in pursuing one, two or all of them.

Ms Lo: OK. I very much agree with Les Allamby that we seem to be putting the cart before the horse. There are so many uncertainties about “work for your benefit” schemes that we are almost dependent on a wing and a prayer. That is a lovely phrase.

The Bill will give the Department the power to run pilot schemes and to consider whether they are appropriate for Northern Ireland. However, it depends on DEL having the resources to carry them out. If DEL says that those schemes are not for us, will that be a breach of parity?

Ms Sisk: No.

Ms Lo: So people will not be asked to go on “work for your benefit” schemes? Do we have the power to opt out?

Ms Sisk: Our Bill provides for people who get to the end of Steps to Work schemes to attend a “work for your benefit” scheme. However, if those schemes do not exist, the power will not be exercised. It is up to DEL to decide whether it can design suitable schemes for Northern Ireland, and one of the things it wants to do is have a look at what is run in GB and how successful it is. If the schemes do not work and help people back into employment, there is absolutely no point in wasting taxpayers’ money on them. The starting point must be that to prove that the schemes are of some benefit and that they assist in getting the long-term unemployed back into work. We must put the power into the Bill to allow us to run the schemes if DEL decides that they work, are beneficial and are cost-effective.

Ms Lo: I understand that, but if England decides to roll out “work for your benefit” schemes across the UK, and we say that we do not want them as they do not work for us, or we do not have the resources from DEL to run them, will we have breached parity with the UK?

Ms Sisk: I do not think that we do. One of the issues on parity is that there are the same conditions. If DEL cannot run those schemes because they are unworkable, the condition is not satisfied. I would not see that as a breach of parity.

We need to have the scope to explore the situation. If at this stage you say no, there will be no chance for either DSD or DEL to explore the schemes and establish whether they work. That is what we are asking for at this point.

Ms McCleary: The schemes in Northern Ireland and in GB could be very different things.

The Chairperson: If this clause goes through as it stands it will completely replicate a clause in the Welfare Reform Act 2009, and that will not be a breach of parity. However, I think that

Anna's point is that if GB goes off on one track and we stay stuck in the station, effectively —

Ms McCleary: Yes.

The Chairperson: That would be a breach of parity.

Ms Sisk: We will still have given the power through legislation to do it. We can still apply flexibility. If it does not work in GB, or if we cannot replicate it because it is not possible in Northern Ireland for us to do anything similar, I do not see that as a breach of parity. I see that as being sensible.

Ms Lo: How much of a case do we have for arguing that Northern Ireland is different if the Department for Work and Pensions says that we have to have schemes like the rest of the UK?

Ms McCleary: It is hard to talk about in theory. Parity is all about equality of conditionality and equality in the amount of benefits that a person receives. There are circumstances — in terms of general operational flexibilities — where differences in Northern Ireland can be taken into account. However, it would be a fundamental mistake to say that Northern Ireland is different full stop, because there are areas in Britain that are not unlike Northern Ireland.

Ms Sisk: That is right.

Ms Lo: That is what I am saying. How strong would our case be for arguing against the running of “work for your benefit” schemes?

Ms McCleary: That is a matter for DEL.

Ms Sisk: Our Department and DEL could make a case to DWP if we decided that, after looking at what was happening in GB and looking at the situation in Northern Ireland, it would not be possible for us to do anything similar. I cannot see DWP having a problem with that. However, DWP would have a problem if we decided to not even attempt it — to not put this in the Bill because we do not want it. That is the difficulty. If we give it a try to see if it works, I do not see DWP having a problem with that.

Mr Brady: If, as you say, the measure is workable, what will happen if DEL does not have the resources to implement it?

Ms Sisk: In that case, it will not happen. If DEL decides that it does not have the resources available to run this, there will not be any schemes.

Mr Brady: With respect, that is a major issue. When will DEL know?

Ms Sisk: The starting point has to be to look at what is happening in Great Britain, see what type of schemes are being run and look at the format of those schemes. As far as I understand, the schemes will be run in four areas in GB, and we have given you information on where those areas are.

Mr Brady: The other issue is parity. Talking about equality and all the rest if it is fine, but to me parity is all about the amount of subvention. A breach of parity is all about money, because if you underspend the money goes back to the Treasury, and if you overspend it comes out of your budget. That is the issue.

Correct me if I am wrong, but I am picking up that DEL is the driving force and that DSD will simply administer what DEL decides. Therefore, we should really be looking at the administration rather than the policy.

Ms Sisk: Where the schemes are available, we will require jobseekers to attend them as a condition of receiving their benefit. That is our role in the process.

Can I also say, Mr Brady, that parity is not just to do with money; it is also about individuals receiving benefit on the same conditions as people in Great Britain and having access to the same benefits at the same rates. We have to be careful about that as well. The issue is not simply money, although it is.

Mr Brady: It is.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is.

Ms Sisk: If we break parity, money comes into it, because it underpins parity.

The Chairperson: As Margaret said, some information has been provided on the pilots. To clarify, Mickey, the pilots begin on 22 November this year and will run for two and a half years. They are taking place in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk and greater Manchester. Two and a half years from this November takes us into 2013. You asked about resources, but it is impossible to know what the resources will be for next year. If the Tory cuts are as bad as feared, there might not even be a DEL by 2013, never mind a pilot scheme.

Mr Brady: I am just thinking in terms of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. I am not sure —

Ms Sisk: I am sure that there will be opportunities for us to get information from DWP on what is happening with the pilots and how they are running. There is no reason why, if it was of help, the Committee could not see information like that before 2013.

Mr Brady: The analogy was made the other day between Newcastle, County Down, and Newcastle upon Tyne. The north-east of England is a deprived region where large industries have simply closed down. Places such as Consett were derelict a few years ago. That is an area that might have more in common with us with regard to unemployment rates and deprivation than Cambridgeshire or Suffolk.

The Chairperson: There are two pilot schemes in greater Manchester.

Ms Sisk: There is also greater Manchester.

Mr Brady: Greater Manchester could include Blackburn and Bolton and all the associated conurbations.

Ms Sisk: The point, though, Mr Brady, is that they are looking at rural and urban areas. The barriers that people face in rural areas are different, so the idea is to take a cross section of areas.

Ms McCleary: A broad spread.

The Chairperson: That is quite similar to a lot of parts of Northern Ireland.

Ms Sisk: That is right. I am sure that, when these things have been up and running for a while, there will be opportunities to get information about them and about how successful they have been. If it would help you to have more information about them well before 2013, we could use our contacts in DWP.

Mr Craig: Margaret, that was wonderful. I am glad that I watched an episode of 'Yes, Minister' last night. *[Laughter.]* It was an eye-opener.

To paraphrase — correct me if I am wrong — everyone seems to agree that the legislation is far from perfect. It is clear to us that it is not perfect; it does not dot all the i's and cross all the t's. However, there is a reason for that. If I am reading the situation right, you are really saying that the legislation is being left open so that it can be interpreted in a number of ways

to give you and, more importantly, DEL the flexibility to implement it fully if the funding is there. As we are all aware, funding will probably not be there.

Truth be told, it would probably be cheaper for DEL to do a pilot scheme somewhere in Northern Ireland. There is flexibility in the legislation to allow it to do that. Ultimately, given the timescales that have been outlined, the most responsible thing for DEL to do would be to give the UK pilot schemes six months to a year, look at the results and then make a sensible decision about whether to go for a pilot scheme in Northern Ireland. Alternatively, in a year's time, we could all be sitting here and there might be no money to implement this, which would knock the whole thing on the head. From what you said, the secret to it all seems to be that although, technically, we can maintain parity by keeping this, in reality, if the finance is not there, there is no breach of parity if we do not actually implement it.

Ms Sisk: That is right. We would break parity if we were to decide here and now that we are not even going to bother, that we do not like the look of it and that, no matter what DWP is doing, we are just not going to do it.

The Chairperson: Or, equally, to amend it radically. That would have the same impact.

Ms Sisk: That is right. We suggest that you leave it and see what happens. All that we are asking for is to put the power into the legislation, and then, depending on the outcomes of the UK pilot schemes, we can make our judgement. As you said, DEL also needs time to look at what happens in GB, because, at the minute, it cannot decide either whether this will work. Nobody really knows anything about the schemes. Yes, you paraphrased it accurately.

Mr Craig: The thing that encourages me, although it may not be in the power of this Committee alone, is the Northern Ireland Assembly's ability not to implement something that might go dramatically wrong in the rest of the UK. We have not lost the ability to control the implementation of this. That is good.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I still think that it is important to put in some of the suggested amendments, even though it is not our call, from what you are saying about DEL.

Mrs M Bradley: If we were not to amend the Bill —

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would not be happy with it.

Mrs M Bradley: What would the situation be then? In a year or 18 months, would we have an opportunity to put in the amendments that we think are right to make now?

Ms McCleary: We would not be able to change the legislation. To change the Bill, we would have to introduce fresh legislation. However, in terms of its outworking — the scheme itself — in a year's time we will know far better how the schemes are going and DEL's thoughts on them.

Ms Sisk: Many of the suggested amendments concern points of detail that are really about the schemes, rather than the power in the Bill, which is simply to establish a scheme. The Bill does not say anything at all about what the scheme will contain.

The Chairperson: That detail will then come in the relevant regulations.

Ms Sisk: That is right, and the proposed amendments to clause 1 are on the scheme's design.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Chairperson, we are making broad, generic points. The nature of a scheme could depend on whatever resources are available to DEL. We are discussing the fundamental principle of supporting people on welfare. The do-nothing approach that the Department is suggesting is totally unacceptable. The principle is generic enough for even staff in DEL to support, and to leave it as a scheme of sorts is just too vague for me to accept. If the Committee cannot agree on an amendment, my party will table one, because I would not be happy to stand over the clause as drafted.

Mr Brady: We need to get real and be honest with people. I take Jonathan's point. Ms Sisk is saying that there is flexibility. I have been around long enough to have gone down this road before. In what was a major change in 1988, supplementary benefit was taken out of the income support equation and the social fund replaced single payments, and we were told at the time how flexible all that would be.

One reads this stuff about "dynamic benefits" from the Centre for Social Justice, which was Iain Duncan Smith, a previous leader of the Tory party if I am not mistaken, but nobody will

convince me that this legislation will not be implemented. As far as I am concerned, the suggestion that there will be flexibility is fine, but I do not accept that the flexibility that we are being told about will happen. I do not doubt Ms Sisk's belief that there will be flexibility, but experience tells me that it will just not happen.

The reality is that we have a Welfare Reform Bill with 37 clauses and four schedules. Unless amendments are tabled now, the opportunity for the Committee to propose them will be lost. The Department is saying, "Let's sit back and see what happens." Once the Bill is passed, it will be too late to amend it. I do not want to be told in the Chamber, as I have been previously, that I am arguing against something after failing to do so in Committee. I am saying now that I am arguing. I want that point to be recorded, because, as far as I am concerned, this is a huge piece of legislation.

Going back years, the guy who came up with the idea for the social fund was seconded from a finance house in the City of London to cobble it together and then returned to the City to leave us with its legacy. That will happen again, because there is no doubt that the Bill's provisions will be implemented. We need to be on top of things, and if we are to propose amendments, they must be relevant. At the end of the day, the Bill will adversely affect the people whom we represent, not the Department for Social Development or DWP. That must be made clear.

Ms Sisk: May I just say, Mr Brady, that you ought to concentrate on the "work for your benefit" schemes? If they do not work, they will not be implemented and rolled out in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland. Nobody is going to run schemes that cost the Government and the taxpayer money if they do not help people back to work. At this stage, the problem is that we cannot tell the Committee whether the schemes will work. We need the pilots to be run in GB in order to see what will happen. The Bill will merely create the power to run those schemes; it does not specify what the schemes will be. That will be something that DEL will have to carry if it decides to run them.

Mr Brady: With respect, you summed it up by saying "create the power".

Ms Sisk: That is all that the Bill does. At present, to create the power to pilot the schemes is all that we ask.

Mr Brady: Why formulate a very detailed Bill such as this just to conduct a pilot scheme? Why not conduct a pilot scheme, see how it works, and formulate legislation around that? We have here a piece of legislation that, once passed, will be implemented.

Ms Sisk: It will not be implemented if the pilot schemes do not work. If the schemes are too costly and do not work, there is no way in the current economic climate that the Government will roll them out.

Mr Brady: My difficulty is over who decides whether they work or not.

Ms Sisk: The starting point is that DWP will decide whether the schemes are working. However, we will also have to assess whether they would work here. The Department for Social Development will have to make that assessment with DEL.

Mr Brady: Therefore, why will we not have pilot schemes here? Jonathan Craig suggested —

Ms Sisk: We will have pilot schemes if DEL decides to run them. The power to do so is provided in the legislation.

Mr Brady: We need to speak to representatives from DEL, then.

Ms Sisk: Yes, if you want to find out whether DEL intends to run pilot schemes. At this stage, I do not think that DEL will be able to give you a yes or no answer. I think that DEL will want to see what is happening in GB first.

Ms McCleary: As others have said, the key point will be around a year from now, when we will have a clearer idea as to how things are progressing.

Mr Brady: With respect, if the schemes are to run for two and a half years —

Ms McCleary: In GB.

Mr Brady: — yet we will know so much about them in a year, why are they to run for a further 18 months? Will there be some fundamental change?

Ms Sisk: They will not be finally evaluated for two and a half years. We are suggesting that DEL may be able to get some information after a year to see how things are running, although it may well be the case that it does not get that information. I accept what you are saying:

that, at this stage, there is much that we just do not know. However, that is because none of the schemes has been up and running for any length of time yet. We have to bide our time; we must wait and see. As I said, nobody is going to run schemes that cost money but do not work.

Mr Brady: The employment and support allowance has been up and running since October 2008 —

Ms Sisk: Apart from anything else, DFP and the NIAO would not be pleased.

Mr Brady: — and there are mixed views on how effective it has been.

Ms Sisk: This is very different from ESA.

Mr Brady: I know, but ESA is the forerunner to what we are talking about.

Mr F McCann: I want to make one small point about the implementation of legislation that does not work, about which we have recently spoken in this Committee. A number of years ago, when people made an application for goods, it used to go directly to the person supplying the goods. It proved hugely disadvantageous to the people who were applying for goods, and it did not work. However, now we are speaking about implementing the same idea again.

Ms Sisk: I think that that concerned care grants.

Mr F McCann: I am just saying that it was proved that that did not work in the past, yet now we are to go through the same thing again.

Ms Sisk: It is slightly different.

The Chairperson: We will return to that later. I was hoping that we might have got to that issue today, but I fear that we might not. I want to try to move the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny on. I have allowed members to express their views several times on clause 1 because I know that it is a fundamental clause and that stakeholders who responded to our consultation expressed many views. I want to move on and get some clarity from the Committee as to its position on clause 1. I have heard some members expressing opposition to it, although it is a means to an end for other members. I think that the point that Jonathan made earlier sums up many members' views.

We all accept — perhaps even the Department accepts — that it is not a perfect clause, but parity applies, and clause 1 is not the final destination of the “work for your benefit” scheme

proposal. The clause creates the power, notwithstanding the comments that members have made. We have heard views expressed in opposition to the clause, and views expressed that were —“supportive” may be too strong a word — accepting of the clause. Does anybody else want to express a view in support of or in opposition to the clause before I put the Question on whether we accept the clause or want to amend it? I take it that there will be a Division. I always like to try to avoid division, but I think that everybody understands the basis on which it is happening.

The Committee Clerk: If the Committee is to divide, I will remind members how the voting system will work. I hope that members will forgive me; I am not patronising them. The Chairperson will put the Question, and members will be asked to indicate which way they are voting by a show of hands. The options are to vote Aye or No or to abstain. A fourth option is not to vote at all, just as would be the case in a plenary sitting. The minutes will therefore record who votes Aye, who votes No, and who abstains but will not record who does not vote.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 3.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Ms Lo.

NOES

Mr Brady, Mr F McCann, Ms Ní Chuilín.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Ms Lo: I would like it noted that we have many reservations about the clause.

The Chairperson: I can make that clear. I have taken latitude to express my opinion from the Chair in the past. I am not satisfied with how the process has gone, to be perfectly honest, and it has put the Committee in an invidious position. Several amendments were suggested from which, when regulations are made, we may get a bit more purchase. Stakeholder groups have suggested amendments in good faith, and although some of us feel that, even though they

are very good suggestions, it is difficult to run with them. However, I acknowledge that other members would be happy to do so. Everyone understands what has happened, and I will ensure that, in our report and in any speech that I make at the Bill's later stages, we express those concerns.

The Committee Clerk: Some members indicated that they might wish to table an amendment on behalf of their party. If they wish to do so, will they please indicate to me and the Bill Clerk, as soon as they are able to, which amendments they have in mind? That is so that the Bill Clerk has time to draft them.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It should be clear that Sinn Féin wishes to amend clause 1.

The Committee Clerk: Yes, but we wish to know which amendment and what you have in mind. Let us know as soon as possible, because amendments can be a nightmare to draft.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely.

Clause 2 (Work-related activity: income support claimants and partners of claimants)

The Chairperson: Clause 2 requires claimants who are in receipt of income support, income-based ESA and JSA who are not lone parents of children under the age of 3 to undertake work-related activity. The clause allows DSD or DEL, in circumstances to be set out in subsequent regulations, to issue a direction to a person to undertake work-related activity. The clause also allows regulations to be made that set out a good cause for failing to undertake mandatory activities.

Stakeholders have indicated numerous concerns, mostly around the absence of childcare in Northern Ireland, and suggested changes in the clause, including the replacement of sanctions with the payment of premiums for compliance; exemptions for certain groups of claimants; and suggestions for the better delivery of ESA and JSA.

I refer members to the suggested amendments, which are amendments N to T in the table in the Committee Stage summary. Is there anything that the Department wants to add to the evidence that the Committee has already heard on clause 2?

Ms McCleary: No, I do not think so.

The Chairperson: Do members wish to express any views on the clause at this stage? In the

correspondence from the Department, there is more detail on what constitutes “good cause”. Such circumstances include disease, or physical or mental disablement; sincere religious or conscientious objection; transport; caring responsibilities; attendance at court; arranging or attending a funeral; lifeboat crew member or part-time firefighter; and domestic emergencies. There are some very good examples of good cause there.

Mr Brady: It is fairly flexible.

The Chairperson: Yes, it is fairly broad. Do members want to express any views?

Mr Brady: I have one point to make. Why does the Department specify a child under the age of three? That age limit is much too low.

The Chairperson: Is that correct? If the child is three or under —

Ms Sisk: It does not apply to a child under three. It applies to children aged three to six.

The Chairperson: As I mentioned before we started, if childcare is an issue —

Ms Sisk: All of that, yes.

Mr Colm McLaughlin (Department for Social Development): Childcare will be included as “good cause”.

Mr Brady: You also said that “work-related activity” does not necessarily mean work.

Ms Sisk: It absolutely does not mean work, Mr Brady. That is one thing about which we need to be very clear.

Mr Brady: For instance, a lone parent could argue that looking after a four-year-old *[Inaudible.]*

The Chairperson: It is certainly work.

Ms McCleary: Well, yes. Perhaps they should not be doing that. Let us not go down that road.

Mr Brady: That could be a reasonable argument that has not been factored in.

Ms Sisk: The Bill does not specify what work-related activity consists of. At this stage, I do not know whether there will be any definition of “work-related activity”, even in regulations. However, I suggest that what is really being referred to is the type of activity that would make people more employable in the long run. Therefore, whether looking after a child is

sufficient to qualify would have to be left to the personal adviser and the decision-maker.

Mr Brady: Considering the dearth of childcare, people could argue that they are working towards getting a job.

Ms Sisk: Yes, one could argue that about childcare. I am sure that that is a possible argument.

The Chairperson: The phrase is flexible.

Ms Sisk: Yes, it does not specify what it is, so I am sure that your point is arguable, Mr Brady.

Mr Brady: Some might say that that is stretching flexibility.

The Chairperson: It is far too flexible.

Ms Sisk: Our Department and DEL have said that we intend to be as flexible as possible and to take full account of conditions in Northern Ireland and of the availability and non-availability of childcare. That is one reason why not spelling out what “work-related activity” means makes life a lot easier. It can then be interpreted in many different ways.

Mr Brady: What would be the implications of the Committee’s deciding that three was too young and recommending an amendment to move the age limit up?

Ms Sisk: Raising the age limit would break parity.

The Chairperson: We have the same conditions.

Ms Sisk: Yes, that is right.

Mr Brady: *[Inaudible.]* childcare provisions.

Ms Sisk: However, we are saying that we will take that into account.

Mr C McLaughlin: We will take all of that into account.

Ms Sisk: The non-availability of childcare will be taken into account when this is looked at.

Mr Brady: For how long?

Ms Sisk: As far as the Department is concerned, there is absolutely no time limit. It will be taken into account until childcare is available.

Mr Brady: Until the child grows up?

Ms Sisk: Well, until it is not needed any more, yes.

The Chairperson: Some people never grow up.

Mr F McCann: To follow on from that, I know that you say that that is in the Bill, but every clerk in every DEL office will not be checking the wording. Will there be written instructions?

Ms Sisk: Absolutely. There will be instructions and training for staff in all of these things. DEL is completely on board with us on what constitutes good cause and all the flexibilities. We checked those issues out with DEL before coming back to the Committee. Both Departments are entirely in agreement on the matter.

Mr F McCann: Our sitting here can sometimes feel like a waste of time, particularly when dealing with the Bill, because we have no control whatsoever over the vast majority of its provisions.

Ms Sisk: Many of the face-to-face discussions with the people who will be involved will be carried out by staff from DEL. However, there is close liaison between our Department and DEL. We have spoken to DEL officials about the Bill on a number of occasions before coming to the Committee. Therefore, we know a great deal about that Department's attitude towards it.

Ms Lo: When lone parents with young children are asked to take on work-related activities, surely they should be entitled to payment to cover childcare. Are they?

Ms McCleary: Expenses perhaps.

Ms Sisk: It depends on what that work-related activity is. As far as I am aware, if they require childcare to carry it out, they are probably entitled to claim for it. Money would be made available to them.

Ms Lo: Would that cover attending interviews, compiling CVs and other —

Ms Sisk: They will not be out of pocket for having to do anything like that.

Ms Lo: The problem is finding and accessing it. That is why —

Ms Sisk: The problem is childcare, and we recognise that. We also said that a woman who says that she cannot find childcare will not be challenged on that by her personal adviser. Her word will be accepted.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Will there be a blanket exemption for parents whose children are in receipt of disability living allowance (DLA)?

Ms Sisk: Yes, if they are on the middle or higher rates of DLA, there is a blanket exemption.

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is with a DLA care or mobility component?

Ms Sisk: Yes.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 3.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Ms Lo.

NOES

Mr Brady, Mr F McCann, Ms Ní Chuilín.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 2, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 3 (Lone parents)

The Chairperson: Clause 3 ensures that lone parents with a child under seven years of age remain a prescribed category of person, entitled to income support. The clause also ensures that lone parents in receipt of ESA with a child under one year of age will not be required to take part in a work-focused interview and that those with a child under three will not be required to undertake work-related activity. Stakeholders have indicated concerns, largely on conditionality for benefit recipients. There are some suggested amendments, which can be found at amendments U to V in the table in the Committee Stage summary. Has the Department anything to add?

Ms McCleary: This is obviously an issue that has exercised various minds for some time. I stress that the intention is to facilitate people in being moved closer to work. I also stress that lack of childcare provision will be taken into account.

Ms Sisk: This is an entirely beneficial clause. The idea behind it is to remove the requirement for parents with children under one to attend a work-focused interview. At present, parents with children under one are required to attend periodic work-focused interviews. Clause 3 will remove that requirement, so it is an easing of conditionality for lone parents and parents.

The Chairperson: Some of the objections are to the clause in general.

Ms Sisk: Yes. However, people may also misunderstand its intention. It is a beneficial clause; it is a release of conditionality, rather than an increase.

The Chairperson: All the other assurances still stand?

Ms Sisk: Yes.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 3.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Ms Lo.

NOES

Mr Brady, Mr F McCann, Ms Ní Chuilín.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: A pattern is developing.

Clause 4 (Entitlement to jobseeker's allowance without seeking employment etc.)

The Chairperson: Clause 4 extends access to income-based JSA to groups that currently qualify for income support. The clause is designed to support the abolition of income support. Stakeholders have made limited comments, indicating that the provision should not be enacted until detail is provided of the impact on carers of the requirement to undertake work-related activity. No amendments were suggested. Has the Department any comment to make?

Ms McCleary: I stress that the one point to stress is that the clause does not apply to carers.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It does not apply?

Ms McCleary: It does not.

The Chairperson: Do any members wish to comment? If not, is the Committee content to agree the clause without dissent?

Ms Lo: We are breaking the pattern.

Ms Ní Chuilín: We are not voting against it. I thought that I would just prove you wrong there, Simon.

The Chairperson: I am all flustered now. I was on a roll before.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 4, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 5 (Couples where at least one member capable of work)

The Chairperson: Clause 5 removes entitlement to income support and to income-related employment and support allowance for couples where one member is capable of work. Regulations will set out the circumstances in which a member of a couple is treated as being capable of work.

Stakeholders indicated concerns about the impact on carers, and how the provision will prevent claimants from availing themselves of employment support that is available to ESA claimants and of the additional payment for undertaking work-related activity. Amendments were suggested, which are at amendments W to X in the table in the Committee Stage summary. Anne, do you have anything to add?

Ms McCleary: I will just say again that the aim of the clause is to help back into work those who are capable of work. I stress again, however, that caring responsibilities, which I know are a concern, will be part of that assessment.

Mr Brady: Does the carer then have to be verified, as it were, if they are getting carer's allowance?

Ms McCleary: Any caring responsibilities will be taken into account.

Mr Brady: That is the important bit, because many carers are in receipt of benefits.

Ms Sisk: That would be where the good cause provisions would come into play. Caring would be a good cause.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Will that be clearly set out in the regulations governing that clause? The clause states: "Regulations may prescribe

circumstances". Will the regulations outline what constitutes a good cause?

Ms Sisk: Yes. Good cause applies to any mandatory activity. Good cause is a reason not to take part.

Ms Ní Chuilín: OK.

The Chairperson: We can obviously revisit that issue when the regulations come through.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 5, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 6 (Statutory sick pay and employment and support allowance)

The Chairperson: Clause 6 provides a regulation-making power to allow people who are receiving statutory sick pay to claim income-related ESA instead of income support. No amendments were suggested. Do you have anything to add?

Ms Sisk: No.

Mr Brady: At present, if a person is on statutory sick pay, the income support element is only a small aspect of the benefit. The explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill states: "Currently people may receive income support in addition to statutory sick pay. In order to abolish income support, alternative provision needs to be made for this group of people."

What will that alternative provision be?

Ms Sisk: The alternative is to move them on to income-related employment and support allowance instead. However, they would still be passported to all the benefits that they would have received had they been getting income support.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Are they penalised for being sick?

Ms Sisk: No. The clause simply changes the name of the benefit that they are on. It is just a technicality.

Mr Brady: [*Inaudible.*] The phrase "alternative provision" needs to be clarified.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The previous clause, for example, states: "Regulations may prescribe circumstances". Perhaps that should be written into the Bill. The explanatory and financial

memorandum to the Bill states: "alternative provision needs to be made for this group of people."

Ms Sisk: I do not know whether the regulations specifically need to say that the passporting provisions will apply, because passporting applies to anyone in receipt of any income-related benefit. If people are receiving income-based jobseeker's allowance or pension credit, or anything that is income-related, they are entitled to free glasses, and so on.

Mr Brady: I take that as clarification of the ESA aspect.

Ms Ní Chuilín: That will be reflected in the Minister's comments at Consideration Stage.

Ms Sisk: You will also see what is in the regulations.

The Chairperson: If that were made clear at Consideration Stage, that would be helpful.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 6, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 7 (Transitional provision relating to sections 4 to 6)

The Chairperson: Clause 7 provides for transitional arrangements for people transferring from income support to ESA and JSA. No amendments were suggested by anyone in our evidence sessions. Have you anything to add?

Ms McCleary: No, I think it is purely a technical point.

Mr F McCann: In relation to the transitional support, there will obviously be a change in benefit, and normally when changing from one benefit to another people have to go through the whole process of applying for the new benefit. I take it that, in the transitional period, that will not be the case, and it will just happen automatically.

Ms Sisk: Yes. The regulations will allow for the transition to be made so that when people stop being awarded one benefit they are awarded another benefit. It will ensure that there is no gap in the payment, so that nobody will actually lose anything. It is a technical thing that is

required to allow people to move from one benefit to another benefit.

Mr Brady: Are you saying that it will be seamless?

Ms Sisk: It will be a seamless transfer as far as the person is concerned. They will not see any difference.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 7, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 8 (Assembly procedure: regulations imposing work-related activity requirements on lone parents of children under 7)

The Chairperson: Clause 8 provides that regulations relating to lone parents' work-related activity where the child is under 7 will be subject to confirmatory resolution procedure. That is a technical point. No amendments were suggested. Do members have any comment? It is positive, in that the Assembly has the final say on it.

The Committee Clerk: I should advise members that the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has not been received yet. That is why the Chairperson is saying "subject to the Examiner's report". If, when that report comes back, members choose to adopt his recommendations, for example, to change the type of procedure —

Ms Ní Chuilín: We can do it?

The Committee Clerk: Yes.

The Chairperson: I think that we are generally supportive.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 8, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 9 (Abolition of income support)

The Chairperson: This will not be just as easy. Clause 9 allows the abolition of income support when there are no longer any groups of entitled claimants. Entitlement to income support can be ended by confirmatory resolution regulations. Stakeholders have indicated opposition to this provision, highlighting concerns in respect

of errors and arguing for exemptions and additional safeguards. There are two suggested amendments, Y and Z.

Ms McCleary: Again, we have discussed this at length. I stress again that there is no end date necessarily in sight for income support, because we cannot move away from it until such time as the carers issue is resolved. However, this gives us the framework to move.

Mr Brady: One of the issues that stakeholders had was that you cannot just remove income support without having an alternative. What you are saying is that that alternative —

Ms Ní Chuilín: Is not there.

Mr Brady: — will be in place.

Ms Sisk: It will be in place before income support is removed.

Mr Brady: That was one of the issues that stakeholders had, because if you abolish income support without replacing it with something better, or at least comprehensive —

Ms Sisk: That will not happen. That is why we are saying that that no end date has been decided. Until a suitable alternative benefit can be identified, income support cannot be abolished. The purpose of the clause is just to allow for that to happen. It removes all of the references to income support.

Mr Brady: I would almost say that was reassuring.

Ms Sisk: Income support will not be abolished until there are suitable alternative arrangements for everybody who is currently on income support.

The Chairperson: It would be useful if the assurances that we have heard here, and before from the Minister, were repeated by the Minister —

Ms Sisk: At Consideration Stage, yes. That will not be a problem.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 9, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 10 (Power to direct claimant to undertake specific work-related activity)

The Chairperson: Clause 10 allows DSD or DEL to specify a work-related activity for an

ESA claimant to undertake. Non-compliance will be sanctionable unless there is good cause. Stakeholders highlighted concerns in respect of how that provision will affect claimants with mental health issues. No amendments are suggested. Has the Department anything to add?

Ms McCleary: I stress that this is about work-related activity, not about work per se. I also stress that it will be personalised to the individual, such as the people just mentioned who have mental disabilities or education issues or whatever. Those kinds of factors will be taken into account.

The Chairperson: And “good cause” can include mental disablement as well as physical.

Ms McCleary: Yes.

Mr F McCann: I do not know whether the Department can answer this point. One of our concerns has always been the level of training given to staff who deal with people who have mental health problems. I have never been satisfied that a course of six, three or four weeks can equip anyone to deal with the widespread problems of those with mental health difficulties. How can we be guaranteed that staff are trained to a level that enables them to deal with it? Sometimes doctors or GPs fail to identify people who suffer from mental health problems.

Ms Sisk: The majority of the staff who deal with such people are personal advisers in DEL. DEL would say that it has its staff trained sufficiently by psychologists. However, if it would be helpful, I will ask our counterparts in DEL to give us information about the type of training that they give to personal advisers. We will ask for that and let the Committee have a note on it.

Mr Brady: The two issues follow on from what Fra was saying. Mencap raised that issue, obviously. *[Inaudible.]* Autism, because adult autism —

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Don't Write Us Off campaign.

Ms Sisk: Yes. We are well aware of it.

Mr Brady: The difficulty for people with autism, both adults and children, is that they have very fixed regimes. Even work-related activity, never mind actual work, has to be handled very sensitively. It comes back to what Fra said about staff training. We need to be assured that staff will know what they are dealing with.

Ms Sisk: We will ask our counterparts in DEL to give us a note about the type of training that is given to their personal advisers. We have had reassurances about that before, but we will ask again and send a note to the Committee on it.

The Chairperson: I was going to ask that myself. Anyone else?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 10, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 11 (Conditions for contributory jobseeker's allowance)

The Chairperson: Clause 11 changes the period of contributions necessary to claim contributory JSA. Stakeholders commented that the provision may adversely affect seasonal workers. There are some suggested amendments, AA and AB, in the table.

Ms McCleary: It is worth highlighting that we discussed the parity issue long and hard. However, the Law Centre itself accepted that parity applied in this area. There is little scope, if any.

The Chairperson: Whether people like it or not, almost.

Mr Brady: Before jobseeker's allowance was introduced in 1996, people got almost a year's benefit without contributions. JSA reduced it to six months. The purpose of that was to get people off benefit. If you got it for six months, then your wife was working for 16 or more hours per week. That was what it was specifically designed to do, so I am not fully convinced — in fact I am not at all convinced — that the same purpose is not behind this. It has been suggested that *[Inaudible.]* The issue for a lot of people is whether there will be income support, anyhow, to supplement their jobseeker's allowance. *[Inaudible.]*

Ms Sisk: They will be entitled to income-based jobseeker's allowance instead of income support.

Mr Brady: That could still knock a number of people off the jobseekers' list. I think that may be one of the points that have been raised about this. It will probably disenfranchise more people from benefit than it will enfranchise.

Ms Sisk: I do not think that anybody can argue that it will not reduce the number of people who are potentially entitled to those benefits. However, the idea is to align the contributory benefits more closely to periods of work. What is being said is that, in some cases, somebody can qualify for contributory jobseeker's allowance after working for three weeks, which is not what was intended. The idea is that a person must work a minimum of 26 weeks before being entitled. However, as we have said, this clause is quite clearly a parity issue.

Mr Brady: *[Inaudible.]*

Ms Sisk: They did.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 11, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 12 (Conditions for contributory employment and support allowance)

The Chairperson: Clause 12 changes the period of contributions necessary to claim contributory ESA. Stakeholders commented that the provision may adversely affect seasonal workers. There are some suggested amendments, AC and AD. This is very much the same issue as with clause 11. It is a parity thing, a point that was made by the Law Centre.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 12, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 13 (Mobility component)

The Chairperson: Clause 13 allows entitlement to the higher-rate component of disability living allowance for the visually impaired. Stakeholders welcomed the provision. I think that members may actually be enthusiastic about this one. A suggested amendment is at AE in the table.

Ms McCleary: This is definitely a very beneficial clause.

The Chairperson: OK.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 13, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 14 (Maternity allowance and carer's allowance)

The Chairperson: Clause 14 will abolish the payment of adult dependency increases for all new claims to maternity allowance and carer's allowance. Stakeholders opposed this provision. They highlighted the fact that carers who had not worked long enough to claim statutory maternity pay will be penalised. A suggested amendment is at AF in the table.

Ms McCleary: This is one of the other clauses that the Law Centre accepted was a parity issue. It is also worth saying that clause 14 reflects the fact that society has changed. It is now accepted that adult dependency increases are outdated, and we have to move away from them.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 14, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

Clause 15 (Community care grants relating to specified goods or services)

The Chairperson: This is where we have our Romanian washing machines. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Ní Chuilín: It was Spanish cookers.

Mr Brady: With a broken-down grill.

The Chairperson: Or no grill, was it? Clause 15 allows the Department —

Mr F McCann: Mickey still has three of them in the house.

The Chairperson: Clause 15 allows the Department to contract with a supplier — in Spain or wherever — to provide goods and services in lieu of a community care grant. Stakeholders opposed the provision, highlighting concerns in relation to product quality, administration costs and the stigmatisation of claimants. There are some suggested amendments at AG and AH in the table. Have you anything to enlighten us with?

Ms McCleary: I genuinely believe that things have changed since the experiences that others have recounted. The way in which contracts are dealt with has changed fairly dramatically since then, and monitoring and quality control are a key part of that. I genuinely think that it will benefit recipients, who, rather than perhaps having to argue for slightly more than the norm for a particular item because they have a specific requirement for that item, will be able to get the item itself directly. I think that will be beneficial.

Mr Brady: The only thing that has changed is that you now have Czechoslovakian cookers.

The Chairperson: They would be really old, because Czechoslovakia has not been there for about 15 years. They might not even have an on switch.

Mr Brady: They are very old cookers.

The Chairperson: Skodas are from there as well.

Ms Lo: Exactly, and they have improved.

Ms Sisk: One of the concerns raised about this was the stigma that might be attached to it. If somebody gets a cooker or a washing machine it will actually be delivered and installed for them, so they will not have the stigma of having to go to any supplier to ask for it or produce vouchers or anything like that. I would have thought that that might be beneficial for them, as opposed to the opposite.

Mr Brady: The point was made that it will create a monopoly, rather than allowing people to have more choice. That is a difficulty.

Ms McCleary: That will be handled by the awarding of the contract in the first place. There will have to be tenders for it in relation to the EU procurement rules.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Is it going to go down the traditional procurement route?

Ms Sisk: Yes. The contracts are also reviewed periodically. People are not given contracts for ever, so if they do not satisfy the conditions the contract can be moved around. We think that it will get better value for money from the community grant scheme, and that people will also be more inclined to get better goods. They will get what they say they want, as opposed to being given the money.

Ms McCleary: Although in some cases they will be able to receive money.

Ms Sisk: They will get the money in certain circumstances.

Ms Lo: I am a bit concerned. A cooker is a cooker, but there can be different ranges of furniture. There is a big difference between a £50 cupboard and a £200 cupboard. Are they going to get the cheapest range? How is it going to work out?

Ms McCleary: I would not have thought so. The procurement procedure will be looking for value for money — that means value, it is not just about whatever is cheapest.

Mrs M Bradley: So they will have to be quality goods?

Ms McCleary: Yes.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Unless that is set out very clearly it is a wee bit arbitrary at this stage, even depending on the supplier. That is a big concern.

The Chairperson: Say this goes through and we are developing the whole process: how will it come back to the Committee? Are regulations needed to set this up, or is the only assurance we have that it goes through the procurement process, which has its own criteria?

Ms Sisk: I do not think there is a requirement to make regulations, but that does not mean that we could not come back to the Committee to give you more information when we have it. Even DWP has not progressed the issue any great distance yet. After we came to give evidence to the Committee at the beginning we went back to DWP to see if it had more information, but it has not got very far with it either. We can certainly come back to the Committee to provide you with more information once we have it.

The Chairperson: That might be useful.

Ms Sisk: That is not a problem at all.

Mr F McCann: With the best will in the world — and I have no doubt that you sincerely believe what you are saying — I have to refer back to the previous time that this was done. Even today, when people apply for community care grants, there are already fixed prices set against what local offices perceive they should be given and the prices at which they should be buying. What they go for is the cheapest. So it already exists.

One of the difficulties you have, again with the best will in the world, is that once this starts up suppliers will look at mechanisms to get around it. In the past, you could see in local newspapers advertisements about buying second-hand cookers. They got a mechanic in to fix them up and they made triple the price.

Ms Sisk: These will be new.

Ms McCleary: That will not happen. It really will not happen.

Mr F McCann: I understand that you are sincere in saying that. However, the reality will be different. You have said that the Department will try to work around the issue of a stigma, but this will directly hit those areas that suffer from severe and high deprivation. The difficulty is that there are those out there who are seeking to make money. I thought that procurement was trying to get things on the cheap right across the board. I am not just talking about —

Ms Sisk: No, no. Procurement is concerned with quality as well. However, I suggest that at this stage we are talking without having a great deal of information. When we get to the point where we are ready to put together contracts and we have more information, we will come back to the Committee and let it see what we intend to do. We will take on board your views at that stage, when we have some detail.

Mr F McCann: Defer it until then.

Mr Brady: It really is about the outworkings.

Ms Sisk: We will come back to you and talk you through what we intend to do when we have some information about it. We will be more than happy to provide some reassurance on that.

The Chairperson: Do you have no timescale for when that might be?

Ms Sisk: No. We have spoken to DWP, but they have nothing on this as yet. The change of Government has brought a lot of these things to a halt.

The Chairperson: Are members happy to accept those assurances? We cannot defer the whole thing. We will have to take the assurance that the Department will come back to us on this.

Ms Ní Chuilín: We are in no position to vote on this unless we have that assurance.

The Chairperson: Assurance of what?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Assurance on procurement; what it says, and the concerns around it.

The Chairperson: My point is that you are not going to get any detail other than what has been said.

Ms Ní Chuilín: We asked for assurances on previous clauses. The Department is prepared to go forward and say — look, I will give you the wording. It is something about regulations; regulations will be set out clearly to give people some sort of comfort. At the moment, this is just too vague.

Ms Sisk: That will be in the contracting process. This does not require regulations to set it up; the contracts will set it up. What we are saying is that we cannot come back to you with regulations, but with the contract, and let you see what that says and take on board any concerns you have at that stage. I am sure that there is no difficulty in letting you have input to the contracting process, if that would help.

Ms McCleary: The procurement process is lengthy and complex.

Ms Sisk: Input to the contracting process might help. If you have concerns and you want to tie things down more closely, I cannot see that that would be difficult.

Mrs M Bradley: That is a good idea. None of us want to put people into embarrassing positions or attach stigma. This will allow us to see that.

The Chairperson: We have got some level of comfort and assurance that we will not be excluded from the process. Can we have that repeated at Consideration Stage?

Ms Sisk: We will write into the Minister's speech that we will come back and talk to the Committee about this.

The Chairperson: If we are not content with all that is said, we always have the option, like everything else at Consideration Stage.

Mr F McCann: This goes to the heart of providing choice for people. At a time when most people are saying that they want to widen the choice for people in many different things, we are reducing people's choice.

Ms Sisk: We are trying to get better for money for people. Sometimes it is a case of priorities.

Mr F McCann: You are looking to get things cheaper?

Ms Sisk: No. Better value for money does not necessarily mean getting things cheaper.

The Chairperson: In theory, getting better value for money —

Ms Sisk: Economies of scale. That is right.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 15, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: Time is pressing on. We will do two more which are related, and it should not be too difficult. We will take it up to clause 17 and then break.

Clause 16 (Community care grants: reviews and information)

The Chairperson: Clause 16 prevents a review where an award of goods and services has been made in lieu of a community care grant. The clause allows regulations for the exchange of information between the Department and relevant suppliers. Stakeholders made the same points as with clause 15: they opposed the provision and highlighted concerns in relation to product quality, administration costs and the stigmatisation of claimants. No amendments were suggested. It relates to the previous clause, and those assurances relate to that as well. Does anyone want to raise anything further?

Mr Brady: Is this saying that, if someone is awarded goods and is not happy with them, they cannot apply for a first- or second-stage review?

Ms Sisk: As I understand it, yes. The reason why most reviews have been carried out in the past was that people had asked for a specific sum of money and did not get it. They might have asked for £200 and got £100, whereas now they will be asking for an item and will get that item. There will be no reason to ask for a review.

Mr Brady: What about the Spanish cooker?

Ms Sisk: Hopefully, they will not receive a Spanish or Czech cooker, or a Romanian washing machine.

Mr Brady: With the greatest respect; I am not being facetious. Really what it is saying is that if you get an item —

Ms Sisk: They will get what they ask for.

Mr Brady: You might ask for a Rolls-Royce and get a Trabant.

Ms Sisk: One must be reasonable. If someone applies for a cooker and gets a cooker, the argument is that there will be no need for that decision to be reviewed. They will have got what they wanted.

Ms McCleary: Providing it is working, of course.

The Chairperson: If they get a rubbish item — *[Interruption.]*

Ms Sisk: Yes.

Mrs M Bradley: If they asked for more than one item and only got one, there would be no comeback.

Mr Brady: It is about quality assurance.

The Chairperson: As long as the quality is OK.

Ms Sisk: Again, that is the contracting.

Ms McCleary: *[Inaudible.]*

Ms Ní Chuilín: It goes back to the previous clause.

The Chairperson: It does. It is entirely to do with the nature of the contract.

Ms Lo: I have never come across the word “preclude” before. What does it mean?

Ms Sisk: It means “prevent” or “not allow”.

Ms Lo: Sorry; I have learned a new word.

The Chairperson: You learn something new every day.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 16, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: We will do clause 17 and that will do us, because we are nearly at 12.00.

Clause 17 (Regulations relating to information: Assembly control)

The Chairperson: Clause 17 allows for regulations to create an offence relating to unauthorised disclosure of information relating to community care grants. Stakeholders again made the same

points as with clause 16: they opposed the provision and highlighted concerns in relation to product quality, administration costs and the stigmatisation of claimants. No amendments were suggested. Does anyone have anything to add?

Ms Sisk: Nothing to add.

The Chairperson: It fits in with the previous stuff.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 17, subject to the Examiner's report or other consequential amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: That will do for today. We will suspend clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill and come back to it next Tuesday. We have made a lot of progress. I thank Committee members, and Anne, Margaret and Colm for their assistance.

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 30 April 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what bids their Department has made in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5168/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The purpose of the ‘Invest to Save’ fund is to provide additional financial support to Departments to cover the upfront costs of making efficiency savings in 2010/11 and beyond. Having carefully considered the intended purpose of the fund, our Department, has not at this stage, identified a need for additional financial support to assist with the delivery of our efficiency savings.

Whilst we have not identified any specific projects requiring support from the ‘Invest to Save’ fund per se, our core functions will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the efficient and effective use of public funds in the future. For example, improving relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland and building a shared and better future continue to be high priorities for OFMDFM and the Executive. The programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is currently being developed and funding for the promotion of community relations and good race relations has been increased by a third to almost £30 million during 2008-2011. In addition, our Department has provided funding for a number of initiatives aimed at improving community relations which when effective reduce the future requirement for separate and sometimes less efficient facilities and services.

Undocumented Irish Immigrants in America

Mr P J Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail what representations were made, on behalf of undocumented Irish immigrants in America, when they met with President Obama in Washington.

(AQW 5903/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: During our meeting with President Obama on Wednesday 17 March the plight of the undocumented Irish was raised by the deputy First Minister. The deputy First Minister’s comments in support of the undocumented Irish were acknowledged, not only by the President, but also by Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Clinton and General Jones, Director of the National Security Council, who were all present at that meeting.

Childcare Places in Women’s Centres

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to support childcare places in women’s centres to assist women returning to employment, education and training.

(AQW 5986/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: There is a small amount of support for childcare in 13 women’s centres currently funded by the Department for Social Development. However, Ministers are

aware of the wide range of issues existing in this area and the need for a more strategic approach to the problem.

The Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People tasked members of its cross-departmental sub-group on Child Poverty to undertake an exercise to consider issues around the provision of good quality, affordable childcare. A preliminary report was completed in June 2009 and the Sub-Committee agreed that an economic appraisal be carried out on a range of strategic options.

Due to the fragmented nature of the childcare sector, it has taken some time to gather the considerable amount of detailed information required from several departments on the funding and nature of existing childcare provision including provision in Women's Centres.

It is hoped the economic appraisal report will be completed by the end of April at which time Ministers will consider the way forward. Therefore, at this time it is too early to draw conclusions about future provision.

A timeline for the launch of a draft childcare strategy for consultation will be dependent on the outcome of the appraisal and subsequent decisions by Ministers on the recommendations of the report.

Projects in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the projects their Department initiated or funded between 2000 and 2007 which have a direct impact on the residents of the North Belfast constituency.

(AQW 6191/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM does not hold the information in the format requested for the period 2000 to 2007 as some projects are sponsored through the Belfast City Council who are unable to identify projects for the North Belfast constituency but rather, those which have benefited the North Belfast area.

Similarly, there have been projects administered through the Department of Education's Youth Intervention Scheme and the Community Relations Council that have directly benefited that area. Since these are administered by a third body, officials are not able to provide a breakdown.

We are able to provide a list of projects for the North Belfast area covering part of the period requested and these are set out below.

Funding from OFMDFM has been channelled through the Community Empowerment Partnerships (CEPs). The CEPs are a confederation of stakeholder organisations operating in or on behalf of the various North Belfast communities

FUNDING FROM OFMDFM

Organisation	Project Summary
Advice	Development and training, volunteer programme
Ardoyne & Marrowbone	Respect Programme, Assist, Youth Programmes, Development of Community Forum
Citizen Youth	Scout groups aged 6-18 years, Youth and leadership programmes
Cliftonville	Development of CARR management committee, Youth Forums, Team Building, CEP Newsletter, Common Purpose projects, Positive Images Project
Developing Leadership Initiative	Transforming Communities, Growing an Active Community, Developing Shared Spaces

Organisation	Project Summary
Greater Ballysillan	Person-centred planning, Youth Cross community, Time Warp Project, Community Assistance Panels
Greater Greencastle	Focus Groups, Newssheet, Young Women's Cultural Awareness Programme, CEP & Citizen Youth Programme
Ligoniel	Communications Strategy, Newssheets, ESCAPE, Creating Communities
Lower North	Youth Forum, Energise, Peer Education, Cross Community Strategic Plan, Community Planning, Child Protection, Intergenerational Programme
New Lodge	Focus Groups, Implement Shared Future, Intergenerational, Youth Intervention, Economic Empowerment
Rathcoole	Strategic Cross CEP event, OCN introduction to Youth Work, Community Leadership, Youth Leadership, Focus Groups
Upper Ardoyne	Youth Forum, Young Person's Cross Community Project, Capacity Building/Informal Education Programme, Consultancy Support, Community Newssheet
Upper North	Cross-community dialogue, mentoring and coaching, youth forums/leadership
North and West Parades and cultural forum	Salary and travel costs
Belfast Reconciliation Network	Salary and running costs

OTHER PROJECTS – FUNDING FROM COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

Organisation	Project Summary
Ashton Community Trust	To develop and implement a co-ordinated approach to community relations work in Catholic communities across North Belfast and to develop co-operative linkages with organisations in the Protestant community in order to develop both intra and inter community relations.
Intercomm	To build capacity within communities in North Belfast for conflicts to be resolved without violence and to engage in processes of peace building
174 Trust	To promote the building of bridges and good relations between all the communities in North Belfast by encouraging mutual understanding through honest dialogue and meaningful engagement.
Ashton Community Trust	To develop and implement a co-ordinated approach to community relations work in Catholic communities across North Belfast and to develop co-operative linkages with organisations in the Protestant community
Belfast Interface Project	To engage in the development of creative approaches towards the regeneration of Belfast's interface areas.
Belfast Interface Project	Additional Core Funding Support

Organisation	Project Summary
LINC Resource Centre	Additional Core Funding Support
174 Trust	Additional Core Funding Support
Holy Family Youth Centre	A 9 month programme of activity designed to celebrate and raise awareness about the many traditions and cultures of people living in Northern Ireland.
Holy Family Youth Centre	Community Relations Training as part of staff and volunteer development at Holy Family Youth Centre in North Belfast.
Deanby Youth Centre	CR Training Programme.
Holy Family Youth Centre	A project exploring religious and cultural diversity for youth of North Belfast combining a series of educational tours and photographic workshops to record findings.
Crumlin Road Presbyterian Church	Seeding support towards the establishment of inter-church reconciliation study.
Link Resource Centre	Community mentoring programme aimed building capacity within interface community.
Ballysillan Presbyterian Church	Strengthening Civic Society 2007 Event to help support community cohesion within North Belfast.
Belfast Interface Project	Survey of membership needs.
Ashton Community Trust	North Belfast Interface Network: Summer Intervention Programme.
Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre	Summer scheme with a difference as we aim to share with Deanby Youth Club (Catholic based group in the area). The activities will be the usual day trips away for young people.
Crumlin Road Presbyterian Church	Inter-church dialogue project aimed at promoting interface co-operation and understanding between differing communities.
Institute for Conflict Research	Documentation of key projects across a range of peace-building activities.
Belfast Interface Project	A comprehensive map of interface areas in Belfast concentrating on the dividing structures which were not purpose built by the NIO.
Mid Skegoneill Community Group	A detailed three year operational plan to enable the group to develop a long term approach to community relations.
Tar Isteach	Community event aimed at providing diversionary activities during a particular period of interface tension.
North Belfast Alternatives	A project providing activity along an interface area in North Belfast which will encourage youth to come together and engage in a series of activities encouraging partnership working.
Linc Resource Centre	To support Salary Costs to establish effective communication links between LINC Resource Centre and a broad range of other agencies/groups to build good relations.

OTHER PROJECTS – FUNDING FROM BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Organisation	Project Summary
LINC Resource Centre	To deliver a mentoring programme to new local voluntary community activists who will establish long term partnerships on intra and inter community basis as well as with civic society on issues such as tackling sectarianism, developing shared neighbourhood spaces and other good relations themes.
Ardoyne Fleadh Cheoil Group	Ardoyne Fleadh Cheoil Project – to deliver the ‘North Belfast looks Forward’ debate, the annual Frank McCallum lecture and the Celebration of Faiths event on 6th & 7th August.
Ballysillan Presbyterian Church	Civic/church relationship conference - To run a conference in the autumn of 2007 involving members of local civic and faith communities in North Belfast as a contribution to community relations work.
North Belfast Women’s Initiative & Support Project	A series of events aimed at bringing women and children from Glenbryn together with women and children from other cultures to build relationships, explore common interests and cultural differences.
Arts for All	Arts for All will examine a number of community art projects throughout north Belfast to assess how this medium lends itself to addressing difficult and contentious issues around good relations themes and produce a piece of best practice research.
Corner House Cross Community Family Centre & Duncairn Community Centre in Tiger’s Bay	This project aims to offer 15 women from Tigers Bay and the New Lodge areas of Belfast the opportunity to participate in a cross community residential in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. The residential will focus on issues of conflict resolution and strengthening local intercommunity relationships.
Dance Starz	To work with local community artists, dance tutors young people and adults from the North Belfast area in the preparation and delivery of a dance festival next April.
KABOSH Theatre	The Jewish Memory Project - This project aims to create an oral history programme involving 100 participants – archiving the stories of the aging Jewish community in Belfast and Northern Ireland as well as those who recently emigrated. This oral history project will then be used to inform an innovative premiere theatre production, exhibition and publication that tells the story and history of the Jewish community within Belfast and Northern Ireland.
Community Engagement (Duncairn)	A celebration of the music and life of James Galway, and the musical heritage of the Duncairn/Tigers Bay area.

Organisation	Project Summary
Upper North Belfast Community Empowerment Partnership	Look at Me - This proposal will begin the process of exploring the culture and traditions of this loyalist community, explore how they are viewed by the wider unionist community and how they perceive the nationalist community. The findings will be published as a qualitative piece of research.
Shankill Women's Group	This proposal is to bring 24 women, 12 from the Shankill area and 12 from the Falls Rd and Oldpark area together to engage in cross community and capacity building activities culminating in a number of site visits.
Indian Community Centre	A 3 day training programme on anti-racism between members of the Indian Community Centre and local people from North Belfast.

Community Relations Council

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the total budget of the Community Relations Council; and (ii) the total amount in grants allocated by the Council to groups, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6222/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Please see the information below regarding the Community Relations Council's total Budget and the total amount of grants allocated to groups for each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Total Budget (£)	Total Grants Allocated to Groups (£)
2009/10 *	8,680,086	6,686,229
2008/09	7,354,196	5,943,243
2007/08	6,428,866	4,821,219
2006/07	6,423,704	5,092,078
2005/06	5,979,215	4,713,583

* Figures for 2009/10 have not yet been finalised by CRC accountants.

It should be noted that the above figures include only grants awarded from OFMDFM funding and do not include projects funded by CRC through the Community Bridges Programme of the International Fund for Ireland or the European Peace and Reconciliation Programme. Information on these funding schemes is available from the published CRC Annual Reports which are available on the www.nicrc.org.uk website.

Executive for the North-South Ministerial Council

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the costs incurred by the Executive for the North-South Ministerial Council in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 6241/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The cost to the Executive for the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) includes the running costs of the NSMC Joint Secretariat (North) which is incurred by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the costs of Executive Ministers attending NSMC meetings.

The total cost incurred by OFMDFM in each of the last three financial years, therefore, excludes the travel and subsistence of other Executive Ministers and their officials and was as follows:

2007 - 2008	£862, 140.25
2008 - 2009	£744, 147.60
2009 - 2010	£645, 349.27

The cost of travel and subsistence for other Executive Ministers and their officials attending NSMC meetings is incurred from the respective Departmental budgets.

Where practicable, future NSMC meetings will be held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat new accommodation in Armagh. This will represent a more cost effective and efficient use of resources.

Quangos

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the funding his Department has allocated to quangos in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 6244/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Each department is responsible for funding their own public bodies. Information on public bodies sponsored by Northern Ireland departments, including the amount of government funding received by each, is contained in the annual Public Bodies Report. Reports for the last three financial years are held in the Assembly Library, or are available at:

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2007-4.doc

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2008-6.doc

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2009__2_-8.pdf

Executive's Senior Legal Officer

Mr D McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who is the Executive's current Senior Legal Officer.

(AQW 6311/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The senior law officer of the Executive is the Attorney General for Northern Ireland. We intend to make an appointment to this office in the near future. Pending this appointment, the Departmental Solicitor is the senior legal adviser to the Executive.

International Ambassadors and Honorary Consuls

Mr B McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they can provide the names and contact details of all international Ambassadors and/or Honorary Consuls who are based in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 6322/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM does not currently hold or update the list of Honorary Consuls in post. We have, however, obtained the updated list of Honorary Consuls as circulated by the Secretary of the Consular Association of Northern Ireland (CA-NI). CA-NI has confirmed that the list covers all local Consular representation. There are no International Ambassadors residing in Northern Ireland.

Below is the most current list of Honorary Consuls.

Belgium	Spain
Mr Jacques Vandervrer Hon. Consul	Mr Gerry McClure Hon. Consul
e-mail: vdv@ntlworld.com	e-mail: joanmccorkill@thompsons.law.co.uk

Sweden	Italy
Mr David Clarke Hon. Consul	Mr Leo D'Agostino Hon. Consul
e-mail: info@heyn.co.uk	e-mail: leo@dagostino42.fsnet.co.uk

Portugal	Netherlands
Ms Cecilia Bouman Hon. Consul	Mr Carson McMullan Hon. Consul
e-mail: cecilia128@btinternet.com	e-mail: shipping@allroute.com

Germany	Denmark
Mr Frank Hewitt Hon. Consul	Mr Donald Price Hon. Consul
e-mail: german.consulni@btinternet.com	e-mail: danish.consul@northernbank.co.uk

Greece	Chile
Mr John F Ewings Hon. Consul	Lord Ballyedmond OBE JP Hon. Consul
e-mail: info@mfewings.com	email: chairman@norbrook.co.uk

France	Lithuania
Mme Regine McCullough Hon. Consul	Mr William Harper Sinnerton Hon. Consul
email: regineonline@hotmail.co.uk	e-mail: bsinnerton@aol.com

Czech Republic	Malta
Mr Milan Mladek Hon. Consul	Tom Kelly Hon. Consul
e-mail: milan@marm.co.uk, belfast@honorary.mzv.cz	e-mail: tomkelly@stakeholdergroup.com

Cyprus	Poland
Mr Nick Lestas Hon. Consul	Mr Jerome Mullen Hon. Consul
email: nick@lestasconsulting.com	email: jerome@seafields.co.uk, jeromemullen@polishconsulateni.org

Slovak Republic	St Vincent And The Grenadines
Mr Tom Sullivan Hon. Consul	Dr Christopher Garry Stange Hon. Consul
email: sullivan@csp.org.uk	email: consul@svgconsulate.co.uk

Norway	Switzerland
Mr Michael Ewings Hon. Consul	Ms Franziska Hewitt Hon. Consul
email: info@mfewings.com	email : belfast@honorarvertretung.ch

Canada	New Zealand
Mrs Lynne Zeller Hon. Consul	Mrs Margaret Lee, MBE Hon. Consul
email: honconcanbelfast@yahoo.co.uk	email: nzconsul@googlemail.com

Usa	India
1. Ms Kamala S. Lakhdhir Consul General	Lord Rana, MBE Hon. Consul
2. Mr Michael Troje - Consul	
3. Mr Prasenjit Gupta – Vice Consul	
1. email: lakhdhirks@state.gov	email: dsrana@andrashouse.co.uk
2. email: trojemt@state.gov	
3. email: guptap@state.gov	

Iceland	Mauritius
Professor James Nixon, FRCS Hon. Consul	Mr Ramesh Rana Hon. Consul
email: nixon-j@sky.com	email: ramesh.rana@hotelheads.com

Mongolia	Slovenia (designate) Currently being finalised by FCO
Mr Richard Holmes Hon. Consul	Ms Suzanne Hill Hon. Consul
email: mongolia_ni@yahoo.co.uk	email : suzanne@handelexport.com

Latvia	Romania
Dr Gerard O'Hare CBE Hon. Consul	Declan O'Loan MLA Hon. Consul
email: mongolia_ni@yahoo.co.uk	email : suzanne@handelexport.com

We do not hold or have access to details of International Ambassadors and/or Honorary Consuls based in the Republic of Ireland. Enquiries in that regard should be directed to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin.

Disadvantaged Communities

Mr M Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they are considering any measures to assist the most disadvantaged communities given the duration of the current economic downturn.

(AQO 1092/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not possible to predict the full extent of the current economic downturn. Members will be aware that in December 2008 the Executive announced its first consolidated package of measures to address the local impacts of the economic downturn. Some measures addressed fuel poverty directly; for example, £25 million in total was spent on the fuel credit and the Warm Homes Schemes.

The work of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum has culminated in the production of specific recommendations for priority actions. This paper – “The Executive’s Priority Measures to deal with the Economic Downturn” – was agreed by the Executive on 25 March 2010.

There are specific measures aimed at addressing hardship, poverty and debt and cover areas such as: providing off-site facilities to help facilitate applications for benefits; promoting benefit entitlement; providing a central point of information on sources of support to address poverty; addressing financial exclusion of younger people; continued insulation of homes under the Warm Homes Scheme; and researching the extent of illegal money lending and scoping a study to research possible alternatives.

More specifically, the Executive Sub-Committee on Poverty & Social Inclusion, which met for the third time on 29 March, is progressing work on a number of priorities which address issues relating to poverty and social inclusion here.

We are keen to advance programmes or initiatives that target the most vulnerable in our society including the most disadvantaged communities, and officials have been tasked to take forward this work – one such example is the work on childcare which has been identified as a major barrier for people joining or rejoining the workforce. Work on this initiative will, we hope, benefit vulnerable groups such as lone parents and low income families, and contribute to efforts to reduce child poverty.

As deprived areas include people on low incomes, any programme or initiative that benefits individuals and families should also benefit their communities.

The Poverty & Social Inclusion Sub-Committee will continue to look closely at the wide range of existing programmes and initiatives across all Departments, to identify gaps in provision and explore means by which such gaps may be addressed, taking into account resource constraints. Area-based initiatives such as Neighbourhood Renewal will form part of this consideration.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr R McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timeline for consultation on, and adoption of, the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

(AQO 1095/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Improving relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland and building a shared and better future is a high priority for OFMDFM and the Executive and the careful development of the new good relations programme reflects this.

We recently agreed the core of the programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Officials have circulated a draft copy of the document to all departments, including the newly established Department of Justice for input of policies, programmes and activities that will begin to construct the cross-cutting elements of the programme. A copy has also been sent to the OFMDFM Committee for discussion.

Departmental replies have begun to come in and officials in OFMDFM are continuing the development of the document with this material. A more complete version of the draft programme will be referred to the Assembly Committee and the Executive for further consideration.

A full public consultation will also take place, providing an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development.

The public consultation is likely to begin in June 2010 and continue until at least the end of September.

Given the nature of the issues being addressed and the wider constituency involved, we hope and expect the consultation to produce many interesting and considered outcomes that will contribute to our overarching policy of achieving 'a peaceful, fair and prosperous society here with respect for the rule of law'.

Once the responses to the consultation have been collated and the programme revised accordingly, the redrafted programme will again be considered by the Assembly Committee and the Executive before it is formally launched.

It is anticipated that the final agreed programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will be published before the end of the year.

Honours System

Mr B Armstrong asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the operation of the Honours system in Northern Ireland and how many full-time and part-time staff are involved.
(AQO 1097/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The present Honours system is a non-political official process that seeks to recognise the contributions of individuals in all sectors of the community.

Honours are an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and recommendations for Honours are a matter for the Prime Minister.

To preserve a non-political approach, the Prime Minister asks the Head of the GB Civil Service, in association with his colleagues, including the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, to make recommendations for his consideration.

Awards are made to all sectors of society covering business, sport, arts and media, health, education, public service and the voluntary and community sectors.

Some 60 percent of awards in Northern Ireland go to people in the community, voluntary and local services sectors.

Any member of the public can nominate someone for an award; some 50 percent of awards are made to people who have been publicly nominated.

Individuals can also be nominated by national associations, bodies or businesses (or government staff in the field) to the government department which sponsors them or their activities.

Recommendations from Northern Ireland are considered, along with those from government departments in England, Scotland and Wales, by individual specialist committees which comprise a non-civil service chair and a majority of non-civil service members, all selected after open advertisement.

The committees are made up from people who have expert knowledge in the field of the particular committee, for example business, the arts, the media, health, education etc.

There is currently one full-time member of staff (at Deputy Principal level) and one part-time member of staff (at Executive Officer level) involved in the administration of the Honours System in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the current position on their proposed solution submitted to HM Treasury regarding the Presbyterian Mutual Society.
(AQO 1099/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We wrote to Gordon Brown on 24 March to set out a proposal for addressing the crisis in the PMS. He has subsequently replied recognising the importance of continuing our work to resolve the PMS crisis and the need to finalise the way forward as urgent business once the general election is concluded.

On 16 April the Executive agreed in principle the key features of this package of measures to support PMS members. These include the provision of loans both to a hardship fund and to the Administrator to facilitate the orderly run-down of the PMS over a period of 7 to 10 years.

A meeting of the Presbyterian Church's special general assembly on 13 April endorsed a proposal that the church should make a contribution to a hardship fund designed to help PMS members. This is a very welcome development.

Beyond the support of the Assembly and the Executive, this proposal will need the support of the Treasury and the Prime Minister to be implemented. It also needs to be tested against State Aids rules and cleared through the European Commission. However, we can assure the Assembly and PMS members that we will do all that we can to resolve this matter as quickly as we can.

Victims' Groups: Funding

Mr M Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the core funding arrangements for groups dealing with victims.
(AQO 1100/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Victims and Survivors Core Funding scheme was established in 2002 and was designed to provide funding support to non-statutory organisations working with victims and survivors. It has been administered by the Community Relations Council on behalf of OFMDFM since then.

Since 2005, the scheme has been extended on an annual basis to allow a total of 48 groups to carry out their work. In the last financial year, over £2.3m was allocated to the scheme.

In preparation for the new Victims and Survivors Service, we have recently announced transitional funding arrangements which will ensure support to the sector over the next two years.

These transitional arrangements include a merging of the Core and Development grant schemes and a re-opening of the new merged scheme for new applications from existing groups and those not currently funded. The Community Relations Council will be meeting with groups shortly to explain the implications of the changes.

In the meantime, all existing core funded groups have been issued with contracts for 2010/11. These contracts will be reviewed subject to the revised applications and work plans received from groups in the coming months.

Sustainable Development Commissioner

Mrs N Long asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the process and timeframe for the appointment of a Sustainable Development Commissioner.
(AQO 1101/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We view the appointment of a NI Commissioner, within the Sustainable Development Commission, as an important part of our plans to progress the sustainable development agenda both within government and in the wider public domain.

Following the completion of a selection process, we are currently considering candidates with a view to recommending appointment of a Commissioner.

We continue to engage closely with the Sustainable Development Commission and this appointment remains a key part of our plans to support the organisation's work here.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr T Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will publish the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy for public consultation.

(AQO 1102/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy will be subject to a full public consultation which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development.

The public consultation is likely to begin after the general election and continue until the end of September.

Child Sexual Abuse

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they will take the lead in directing the Executive's response to the report from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the way forward in dealing with historical child sex abuse.

(AQO 1103/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has circulated a paper to Executive Ministers setting out options for addressing the issue of historical child abuse. The Executive, which we jointly chair, has had initial but wide-ranging discussion on the Health Minister's paper and we are committed to ensuring that the Executive continues to give further detailed consideration and reaches early agreement on its response to this important issue.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timeframe for Executive sign-off on the proposed Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

(AQO 1104/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We recently agreed the core of the programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Officials have circulated a draft copy of the document to devolved departments and the Northern Ireland Office for the input of policies, programmes and activities that will begin to construct the cross-cutting elements of the programme. A draft copy has also been circulated to the OFMDFM Committee.

Once departments have replied, the draft programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and will be considered by the Executive.

The programme will then be the subject of a full public consultation which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development. The public consultation is likely to begin in June 2010 and continue until at least the end of September.

Once the responses to the consultation have been collated they will be taken on board within the context of a revised text as appropriate.

The re-drafted programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and the Executive for final clearance.

It is anticipated that the final agreed programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will be published before the end of the year.

NI Direct

Mr D McClarty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there is any evidence of increased usage by the public of the NI Direct website over the past year.

(AQO 1105/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: NI Direct or www.nidirect.gov.uk is a key programme within the Northern Ireland Civil Service reform programme. NI Direct has a clear objective to improve citizens' access to government information and services.

To date (18 April 2010) the website has registered over 4.5m page impressions and 1.6m visits.

Traffic to NI Direct has increased steadily from its launch in March 2009 - during the first full month of operation in April 2009 there were over 137,000 page impressions and 43,000 visits to the website. In March 2010, NI Direct had over 483,000 page impressions and 175,000 visits.

This makes it one of our most accessed public sector websites. It is also now used as the platform for all citizens facing Government advertising campaigns.

Some examples of early successes include:

- Last August information for school children who had just received their GCSE and A Level results was co-ordinated on NI Direct. This resulted in nearly 24,000 visits across the months of August and September.
- Towards the end of last year, DSD's Benefit Advisory Service was launched on the site. This had been previously available on Directgov but people from here couldn't fully access the service.
- For the first time, DEL's Essential Skills campaign was featured on the site in the Autumn. They got their highest ever response.

We believe NI Direct is already demonstrating its value, with a significant growth in traffic since launch. The next stage will be to improve the site by transferring additional content and online transactions from departmental sites on to NI Direct.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she plans to de-emphasise the land classification criteria in tranche two of the Farm Modernisation Scheme, given the potential disadvantage this may pose to many applicants.

(AQW 6109/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): I have requested that my officials carry out a consultation exercise on the equality screening template for the proposed selection criteria for Tranche 2 of the Farm Modernisation Programme. Consultees are invited to submit their views to my Department by 12 May 2010. Officials will then undertake an analysis of the responses received and I will consider all the views of consultees.

North-South Animal Health Hotline

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the arrangements in place for the operation of the North-South Animal Health Hotline.

(AQW 6243/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Close co-operation on animal health issues on the island of Ireland has the potential to help reduce and prevent animal disease spread, to facilitate trade and to improve the sustainability of farming.

In the event of an outbreak of a serious epizootic animal disease in either or both jurisdictions, it is recognised that sustained co-operation between both administrations will be essential to prevent the further spread of disease. The problems in Britain due to Foot and Mouth, Avian Flu and Bluetongue have put the spotlight on the value of this approach on the island.

Contingency plan common chapters have now been agreed for Foot and Mouth Disease, Avian Influenza and Bluetongue and are included in the respective epizootic contingency plans for these diseases. These chapters put protocols in place to ensure timely communication in the event of a disease outbreak. They set out agreed lines of communication at various levels in each Department and with key external stakeholders.

In addition to dealing with these three key diseases, the model can be adapted in order to deal with any new and emerging diseases, therefore it provides a sound basis for the development of other contingency plans that may be needed.

These early warning systems for serious animal disease outbreaks have been extended to cover other major incidents, including for example in areas such as pesticides, residues, meat and dairy, animal feed and plant health.

Funding for Rural Development Projects

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of match funding available for the initial preparation of rural development projects and how this compares with the funding available in England and Wales.

(AQW 6274/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I understand your question to refer to the level of match funding available for preparation of applications under the NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP).

There are two key elements to technical support available under the Axis 3 measures of the NIRDP 2007-13. Firstly under co-operation projects technical support provides for grant assistance of up to 75% of eligible preparatory costs up to a maximum amount of £5,000 to assist Local Action Groups with the development of a detailed co-operation project proposal. Eligible expenditure may relate to meetings with potential partners; for example travel, accommodation, and interpreter's fees, or project pre-development cost (for example feasibility study, consulting for specific issues, translation costs) and providing technical support for compiling the dossier.

However, under mainstream projects, technical support assistance is available at a grant rate of up to 75% of eligible expenditure for the social economy, voluntary or community sector, or up to 50% for the private sector up to a maximum amount of £5,000. This technical support element is available to help investigate project potential depending on the Axis 3 measure relevant to the project proposal.

It is my understanding that the Rural Development Programme for England does not provide any support for the development of project applications. I believe, however, that support may be provided indirectly through elements of activity supported under Axis 4 Measure 413: Implementation of the local development strategies, or possibly Axis 4 Measure 421: Implementing co-operation projects.

The position in Wales is different again in that a Food Business Advisory Scheme provides assistance towards the submission of Axis 1 Processing and Marketing and Supply Chain Efficiency grants. Funding is available at up to 100% and is normally limited to £1,500 per client per financial year for grant applications and £1,500 to £2000 for additional specialist work. In addition, under Axis 4 Measure 421 preparatory technical support is funded, where appropriate, at 100% grant to help develop projects. This is capped at €5,000.

Sheep Farmers

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if preparations are being made to help sheep farmers in advance of next winter, given the problems they encountered during the recent severe winter conditions.

(AQW 6279/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am fully aware of the impact the recent severe weather has had on the north and I sympathise with farmers who are understandably distressed.

I recently raised the issue of hardship payments for sheep losses as a consequence of the severe weather with the Executive and secured agreement to bid for funding in June monitoring.

Furthermore, the Executive agreed that I ask officials to hold discussions with the farming and insurance industries to see if there are any ways of making insurance more accessible to farmers as this is the direction we would like to see the industry follow.

My Department has issued practical advice to help minimise losses particularly in regard to ewes with young lambs. Sheep farmers seeking practical advice to minimise losses as a result of the poor weather should contact their local DARD Development Advisor.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of times police have been called to incidents involving dangerous dogs in each of the last five years; (ii) the outcome of any prosecutions; and (iii) the number of dogs seized or destroyed as a result of these incidents.

(AQW 6287/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Local councils are responsible for enforcing all aspects of the Dogs Order 1983, including the provisions on dangerous dogs, and provide statistical information to my Department relating to the operation of the Order.

Councils may call on the police for assistance, but my Department does not require them to provide statistics on this. The following table shows the total number of incidents involving dangerous dogs investigated by the Councils in the last five years; the number of successful prosecutions; and the number of dangerous dogs destroyed. Information on the outcome of prosecutions which are not successful is not provided to my Department, nor is the number of dogs seized pending prosecution.

TABLE 1.

Year	(i) Incidents investigated	(ii) Number of successful prosecutions	(iii) Number of dangerous dogs destroyed
2005	26	Not known	Not known
2006	198	6	55
2007	751	22	77
2008	306	9	18
2009	123	9	12

Closet River, Kinnego

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the Closet River, Kinnego (i) was last; and (ii) will be next (a) dredged; and (b) cleaned.

(AQW 6304/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Closet River is designated under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 for maintenance to ensure free flow. As a result DARD Rivers Agency carries out routine inspections of the watercourse and performs maintenance works as necessary. The river was last subject to maintenance works in October 2002 and inspections were carried out in 2004 and 2007. However, at those times no maintenance works were carried out due to the presence of pollutants. NI Water is currently developing a programme of works to remove the pollutants from the Closet River. Once this has been completed Rivers Agency will recommence maintenance works as necessary

Closet River, Kinnego

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what Rivers Agency is doing to address the blockages at the mouth of the Closet River where it meets Lough Neagh.

(AQW 6307/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My officials in DARD Rivers Agency have received no reports of any blockages at the mouth of the Closet River. They are aware of the presence of pollutants in the watercourse at this location and works being undertaken by NI Water to remove these. Any obstruction at the mouth of the Closet River will be removed during this process. Once NI Water has completed their programme of works, Rivers Agency will recommence inspection and maintenance as required

Administrative Burden on Farmers

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department has done since May 2007 to ease the administrative burden on farmers.

(AQW 6312/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have taken a number of initiatives to reduce the administrative burden on farmers. First, I gave an independent panel the task of reviewing regulations and recommending simplification. That panel reported in April 2009, and we published their report and sought additional comments through an informal consultation which ended in September. I will shortly be publishing my Department's response to the independent review. In addition, I have taken action both on the regulatory burden, and the administrative arrangements for grants and subsidies. For example, in July 2009, we secured a very important derogation which will benefit flock keepers as the new sheep electronic identification system is rolled out; this concession provides for the establishment of central points of recording which will reduce the administrative burden on flock keepers, who will not need in general to buy EID readers. Similarly, when I launched the first tranche of the Farm Modernisation Scheme, I took steps to make the application process as simple as possible. We will be holding to that principle when we launch tranche 2. In both cases, the Department consulted industry leaders on the process, and they have influenced how we are administering these arrangements. Looking ahead the Department will shortly launch a consultation on how we propose to review and improve the accessibility of our services. I am satisfied there will be considerable benefits for farmers if they access our services by the most appropriate and efficient means.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she has taken or plans to (i) eliminate; and (ii) reduce the incidence of bovine tuberculosis in wildlife.

(AQW 6315/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The ultimate aim of our TB strategy is to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (TB) in cattle in the north. My Department has a rigorous TB programme in place, approved by the EU, which includes a strand to address the wildlife factor. Action to deal with cattle to cattle transmission of TB will continue to be an important element of my strategy as we move forward. Interventions to address the wildlife factor may include improving biosecurity, as well as options for more direct intervention such as the vaccination of badgers which may be the most feasible solution

in the long-term. As the badger is a protected species any direct interventions will be subject to the agreement of the Environment Minister, where necessary, and to the availability of the substantial additional funding that will be required.

The issue of TB in badgers and TB in cattle is a complex one. We know there is a link between bovine TB in badgers and bovine TB in cattle but we do not know the extent to which badgers contribute to the incidence of TB in cattle here. Moreover, research involving badger culling elsewhere presents a mixed picture of its effectiveness in reducing disease levels in cattle. Recently published results from the Randomised Badger Control Trials in England suggest that the impact in the areas where culling took place was short lived, that the perturbation of badgers led to an increase in TB in surrounding areas and that the costs were prohibitive, outweighing by two or three times the savings from fewer TB herd breakdowns.

We plan to carry out a TB Biosecurity Study this year to assess what critical differences there are between infected and non-infected herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down. Consideration of both selected cattle and wildlife factors will be key elements of this Study which will help inform new biosecurity advice for farmers.

My officials will continue to track the progress of the badger cull in Wales and the outcomes of the various culls carried out in England and in the south of Ireland. They will also monitor closely the progress of the work that is on-going in the south and in Britain to develop a viable oral badger vaccine and a cost effective means of vaccine deployment.

We are also working with the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to establish critical knowledge gaps in relation to TB, taking account of work that is ongoing here, in the south and in Britain. This will enable us to identify further relevant research and development projects.

There is no indication that other wildlife species are a significant issue for TB in cattle. A Deer Survey completed in 2009 found that the prevalence of TB in deer was low at less than 2 per cent.

Funding to Groups in Lagan Valley

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the amount; (ii) and the nature of any funding her Department has provided to groups in the Lagan Valley constituency in the last year.

(AQW 6355/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has provided a total of £190k of funding to groups in the Lagan Valley constituency.

The nature of this funding relates to the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (Annual Premia) paid under Axis 2 of the NI Rural Development Programme, Anti-Poverty social exclusion challenge programme and Axis 3 of the NI Rural Development Programme.

The grant aid with regard to Anti-Poverty and Axis 3 has been offered to various projects but has not yet been drawn down. The Department is not in a position to provide figures on the extent of Anti-Poverty funding which will eventually be drawn down by individual projects in the Lagan Valley constituency.

Single Farm Payments

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applications for Single Farm Payments were received, by constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6405/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 applications to the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme were received by the Department for the 2009 scheme year. 38,764 and 39,004 were received for the 2008 and 2007 scheme years respectively.

The Department does not hold SFP details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total numbers of applications received for scheme years 2007, 2008 and 2009, as at 22 April 2010, for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

ANNEX A

NUMBERS OF SINGLE FARM PAYMENT APPLICATIONS RECEIVED (2007 – 2009) BY POST CODE AREA

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT1	24	25	25
BT2	12	11	9
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	29	29	29
BT5	39	40	40
BT6	31	32	30
BT7	11	11	11
BT8	116	116	115
BT9	44	40	38
BT10	5	6	6
BT11	7	7	6
BT12	3	3	1
BT13	3	4	4
BT14	44	43	44
BT15	14	12	12
BT16	46	47	42
BT17	18	18	18
BT18	54	53	53
BT19	80	79	79
BT20	17	17	17
BT21	70	68	68
BT22	465	465	463
BT23	594	587	584
BT24	595	597	595
BT25	591	588	587
BT26	265	259	260
BT27	300	296	298
BT28	379	371	366
BT29	391	391	380

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT30	910	895	887
BT31	485	480	475
BT32	770	762	763
BT33	143	143	144
BT34	1999	1973	1965
BT35	1726	1724	1716
BT36	113	113	113
BT37	16	15	14
BT38	194	194	197
BT39	647	650	641
BT40	437	438	430
BT41	717	710	701
BT42	1002	1005	1003
BT43	487	479	467
BT44	1408	1418	1426
BT45	1486	1482	1474
BT46	549	545	547
BT47	1112	1109	1111
BT48	67	65	65
BT49	469	459	457
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	931	924	941
BT52	174	169	162
BT53	908	898	884
BT54	286	280	282
BT55	35	30	31
BT56	40	40	39
BT57	199	202	201
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	1705	1690	1683
BT61	493	490	485
BT62	696	695	679
BT63	308	302	303

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT64	2	1	0
BT65	4	5	5
BT66	311	312	303
BT67	341	336	339
BT68	86	87	87
BT69	204	202	205
BT70	1387	1375	1372
BT71	1158	1152	1150
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	548	544	533
BT75	307	302	301
BT76	206	207	204
BT77	140	139	140
BT78	1761	1750	1737
BT79	1584	1583	1587
BT80	1061	1049	1038
BT81	562	554	559
BT82	669	665	665
BT83	0		0
BT84	0		0
BT85	0		0
BT86	0		0
BT87	0		0
BT88	0		0
BT89	0		0
BT90	0		0
BT91	0		0
BT92	1567	1566	1570
BT93	1012	1017	1024
BT94	1004	1010	1013
No BT Postcode Held	331	314	311
Totals	39004	38764	38609

Fishing Organisations

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with fishing organisations to ensure that vessel modernisation is targeted at those fishermen who need it most.

(AQW 6444/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department conducted a Vessel Modernisation Needs Survey in 2009 to determine how best to utilise European Fisheries Funding to meet the modernisation needs of the local fishing industry. The two local producer organisations and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency were involved in developing the questionnaire. In total, 331 survey forms were issued and 42% of fishermen responded.

Seed Mussel Fishery at Copeland Sound, Donaghadee

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the seed mussel fishery at Copeland Sound, Donaghadee will re-open on 3 May 2010.

(AQW 6459/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Having considered the report of a recent scientific survey by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute of the mussel resource at Copeland Sound I have agreed that the resource should be shared between those wishing to develop a wild mussel fishery and the bottom grown mussel sector. The seed mussel fishery will therefore re-open on 4 May and will be subject to appropriate management.

Bee Health Strategy

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on (i) the contingency plan for bee health; and (ii) the local bee health strategy which were expected to be completed last year.

(AQW 6535/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) The Contingency Plan for Exotic Pests and Diseases of Honey Bees, was published in January 2010. It can be viewed on the DARD Website at: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/bee-health-contingency-plan-2010.doc>.
- (ii) The Bee Health Strategy is in the final stages of drafting, following preliminary discussions with the two Beekeeping Associations. It is anticipated that it will be issued for public consultation in the coming weeks.

Farm Modernisation Programme

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consultation has taken place with the farming unions regarding the Farm Modernisation Scheme.

(AQO 1120/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 9 together.

My officials commenced engagement with the farming unions on the Farm Modernisation Programme last summer and met with the Ulster Farmers Union on 24th June 2009 and the NI Agricultural Producers Association on 11th July 2009.

At both meetings the views of the industry representatives were sought to ensure the FMP is targeted on projects most able to demonstrate modernisation. These included: prioritisation of investment areas; format of application; maximum grant rate or variations; maximum grant amount; and procurement methodology. In these discussions with the unions representatives they indicated there should be a focus on young farmers and this has been included in the Tranche 2 selection proposals.

Since the beginning of 2010 officials have met with both the UFU and NIAPA on 20 January and with a further UFU delegation on 28 January. Both farming unions are represented on the NIRDMP Monitoring Committee which was consulted on 3 February. At the beginning of March the UFU wrote advising that they would not engage in an industry representative steering group being convened to consider the modernisation priorities of the items eligible for assistance in the next tranche of the programme funding. During the No Day Named Motion Debate on the Farm Modernisation Programme on 8 March I invited them to re-engage but unfortunately the UFU were not represented when NIAPA and other industry representatives met on 19 March.

Finally, both farming unions are currently being consulted on an equality screening exercise on the Farm Modernisation Programme. The Equality Screening Template is now out to consultation with Section 75 consultees and industry stakeholders. I have recently decided to extend the consultation period deadline by 1 week from 05 May to 12 May to allow further time for responses to be received.

On the question of additional funding for the Farm Modernisation Programme my officials have recently commissioned a mid-term evaluation of the Rural Development Programme which will provide an opportunity to look at allocations and spend under each of its schemes. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation will feed into any decisions I may make, subsequently, to amend the content or financing within the programme.

However, in the current economic climate, spend within the programme will be subject to the same scrutiny as the rest of my Department's spending plans.

Rural Childcare Programme

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Rural Childcare Programme.

(AQO 1125/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: When I first came into office, I set up the Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group to consider the difficulties with childcare provision in rural areas and to make recommendations on how to best tackle these difficulties.

The Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group produced a report which detailed specific challenges facing rural areas including transport/access to existing facilities, affordability of childcare and current provider's ability to access further training courses.

The report recommended that DARD should work in partnership with others to establish a rural childcare funding programme with the aim of addressing these rural specific needs and circumstances.

Taking this recommendation into consideration I, through my Department's Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion work, initiated the Rural Childcare Programme.

Following a comprehensive application, appraisal and assessment process carried out during the summer and autumn of last year the Rural Childcare Programme issued Letters of Offer to successful childcare organisations in October and November. As a result we are currently supporting 20 rural childcare projects to the value of £1.3m.

Implementation plans have been agreed for all the childcare projects and regular project monitoring meetings are being carried out to review progress and to ensure that the project activity remains focused and on schedule. Project activity is now well underway for most of the 20 childcare projects.

Livestock Theft

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many livestock have been reported stolen in the last twelve months.

(AQO 1129/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department is aware that cattle and sheep are reported as being stolen from time to time. The Department does update its Animal and Public Health

Information System (APHIS) database when made aware of such reports, for purposes of disease control etc, but does not maintain specific statistics. Livestock theft, like other property crime, is a matter for the PSNI. I personally have raised this issue at a very senior level with the PSNI and I am sure that the Member could also raise it at Policing Board level.

Ploughing Championships

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much financial assistance her Department intends to give to the Northern Ireland Ploughing Championships this year.
(AQO 1130/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department may provide financial assistance to local agricultural events in the form of sponsorship of the event and other associated costs for staging DARD exhibitions at such events. These other costs can include the cost of hiring trade space at an event or placing an advertisement in the event catalogue. In respect to these costs, DARD paid a total of £14,060 to local agricultural event organisers during 2009. These costs are not yet known for this year.

Wind Turbines

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants are available within her Department for the provision of wind turbines.
(AQO 1131/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Following approaches made to the European Commission and discussions within my department and with other departments and agencies I am pleased to announce that under revised scheme rules Axis three of the rural development programme can now accept applications for stand alone renewable energy projects which may include wind turbines. Under Axis 3 of the programme funds will be available to eligible projects approved by the Local Action Groups within the funding limits and aid intensities as detailed in the programme measure sheets, details of which can be obtained from the Local Action Groups or the DARD website. Furthermore given the interest in biomass fuelled technologies within the agricultural sector DARD propose to launch a Biomass Processing Challenge Fund, subject to securing the necessary approvals.

The purpose of this Fund is to support the purchase of a range of technologies that improve business efficiency and environmental sustainability at farm level by utilising cost effective and sustainable methods of processing agricultural wastes and other appropriate biomass material to generate renewable energy.

A grant rate of up to 40% of capital and installation costs to a maximum of €400,000 per project will be made available to fund technologies ranging from biomass boilers to anaerobic digesters.

The Fund will be operated on a competitive basis and all applications will be scored against eligibility and pre set assessment criteria.

These are good examples of departments and partner organisations working together to achieve a favourable result for the farmers, businesses and rural dwellers and shows my departments continued commitment to green energy and reducing emissions.

Livestock Marts: Help Desks

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she can confirm that help desk facilities at Saturday livestock marts will continue in operation.
(AQO 1132/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Department staff will continue to provide a Saturday Help Desk for cattle markets for the immediate future. A meeting is currently being organised between the NI Livestock Auctioneers' Association (NILAA) and officials to discuss arrangements for the longer term. However the principal responsibility for complying with animal health restrictions and ensuring

animals are eligible to move rests with the herd or flock keeper. The Department has repeatedly emphasised this to keepers and market operators.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Government Funding of Clubs and Facilities

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an up-to-date assessment of the calls to remove Government funding from clubs and facilities that are named after individuals who had previously been involved in terrorism.

(AQW 6319/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): I believe it is totally inappropriate for any organisation engaged in sport, the arts or culture to be named after individuals who had previously been involved in terrorism or other criminal behaviour. Both the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and its statutory arms length bodies have an obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure that they continue to promote (1) equality of opportunity and (2) good relations. Following concerns raised about public funding to sports clubs and facilities that are named after individuals who had previously been involved in terrorism, I asked officials to review the equity clause in the terms and conditions of Sport Northern Ireland's funding programmes and to advise if changes should be considered. This review, which is ongoing, has raised a number of issues on which my Department is currently seeking advice and clarification.

Libraries NI

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to libraries previously controlled by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) but which are now under the control of Libraries NI, to detail (i) the services provided; (ii) the number of people employed; and (iii) the pay, grade and job description of employees, at each of these libraries (a) now; and (b) when they were under the control of the BELB.

(AQW 6375/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: i (a)&(b) The Services provided in all libraries are the same now as when under the control of BELB. These services are detailed in Table 1:

TABLE 1

Library	Services Provided
Andersonstown	Books /Books on tape /Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos /Children's Books on Tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions /Storytimes/talks Internet Newspapers and Magazines

Library	Services Provided
Ardoyne	Book Launches /Books/Books on tape/ Large Print Books /Videos & DVDs Class Visits Community Information Exhibitions/Storytimes/Talks Information Service Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Ballyhackamore	Book Launches/Books/Books on tape/ Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Ballymacarrett	Book Launches/Books/Books on tape/ Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes Newspapers and Magazines
Belfast Central Library	Belfast Ulster and Irish Studies Library Business Library Central Lending Library General Reference Library Life Long Learning Services Music Library Newspaper Library Special Collections and Fine Books Base for mobile and outreach services
Chichester	Book Launches/Books/Books on tape/ Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes Newspapers and Magazines

Library	Services Provided
Falls Road	Book Launches/Books/Books on tape/ Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes Newspapers and Magazines Information service Internet
Finaghy	Book Launches/Books/Books on tape/ Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes/Events Newspapers and Magazines Internet
Grove	Books/ Books on tape/CD/ Large Print Books/Videos & DVD's Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information Exhibitions/Craft sessions/Storytime/Talks Internet Music CD's Newspapers and Magazines
Holywood Arches	Book Launches/Books/Books on CD/Books on tape/Videos & DVDs/Large print books Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Ligoniel	Book Launches/Books/Books on CD/Books on tape/Videos & DVDs/Large print books Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions/Storytimes Internet Newspapers and Magazines

Library	Services Provided
Lisburn Road	Book Launches/Books/Books on CD/Books on tape/Videos & DVDs/Large print books Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Storytimes Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Oldpark	Books/Books on tape/Large print books/Videos & DVD's Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Ormeau Road	Books /Books on tape /Large print books/Book launches/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos /Children's Books on Tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions /Storytimes/talks Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Sandy Row	Books/Books on tape/Large print books Community Information/Information service Internet Newspapers and Magazines Music - Video and DVDs
Shankill	Books /Books on tape /Large print books/Book launches/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos /Children's Books on Tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions /Storytimes/talks Internet Newspapers and Magazines

Library	Services Provided
Suffolk	Books /Books on tape /Large print books/Book launches/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos /Children's Books on Tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions /Storytimes/talks Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Whiterock	Books /Books on tape /Large print books/Book launches/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos /Children's Books on Tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Exhibitions /Storytimes/talks Internet Newspapers and Magazines
Whitewell	Books/ Books on tape/Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/ Children's Books on Tape Community Information/Information Service Internet
Woodstock	Book Launches/Books/Books on tape/Large print books/Videos & DVDs Children's Videos/Children's books on tape Class Visits Community Information/Information service Internet Newspapers and Magazines Storytimes

In addition to the branch libraries a mobile library service is provided in Belfast. Services provided include Adult and Children's Book lending and internet access.

- ii a) The number of people employed in each library, together with their job title, on 31 March 2009 (i.e. when libraries were the responsibility of the BELB) who subsequently transferred to Libraries NI on 1 April 2009 is shown in Table 2 below. Some members of staff work in more than one library but are only counted once (i.e. in their substantive post). Not all staff were full time. Note that the figure for Belfast Central includes staff who worked in an administrative role in the former BELB Library Service.

TABLE 2

Library	Number of people employed (BELB)	Job Title
Andersonstown	3	1 x Senior Library Assistant 1 x Library Assistant 1 x Library Patrol Attendant
Ardoyne	7	1 x Senior Library Assistant 4 x Library Assistants 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Ballyhackamore	8	2 x Assistant Librarians 1 x Senior Library Assistant 4 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Ballymacarrett	4	1 x Senior Library Assistant 2 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Belfast Central	91	1 x Principal Officer 5 x Senior Librarians 11 x Assistant Librarians 1 x Senior Executive Officer (Corporate Services) 9 x Senior Library Assistants 35 x Library Assistants 1 x Personal Assistant 1 x Technician 3 1 x Clerical Officer 1 x Telephonist 2 x Clerk Typists 1 x Building Superintendent 2 x Mobile Library Drivers 2 x Library Driver Attendants 2 x Senior Library Attendants 7 x Library Attendants 9 x Cleaners
Chichester	6	1 Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner

Library	Number of people employed (BELB)	Job Title
Falls Road	6	1 x Branch Library Manager 3 x Library Assistants 1 Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Finaghy	6	2 x Senior Library Assistants 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Grove	7	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Hollywood Arches	5	1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Ligoniel	4	1 x Senior Library Assistant 1 x Library Assistant 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Lisburn Road	5	1 x Branch Library Manager 4 x Library Assistants
Oldpark	1	1 x Cleaner
Ormeau Road	7	1 x Senior Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 4 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Sandy Row	1	1 x Cleaner
Shankill	7	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 Library Patrol Attendant 1 Cleaner
Suffolk	5	1 x Senior Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 2 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner

Library	Number of people employed (BELB)	Job Title
Whiterock	5	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 1 x Library Assistant 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Whitewell	1	1 x Library Patrol Attendant
Woodstock	8	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 5 x Library Assistants 1 Cleaner
Total	187	

- ii b) The number of people employed in each library on 1 April 2010 is shown in Table 3 below. Some staff work in more than one library but are only counted once (i.e. in their substantive post). Not all staff are full time. The figure for Belfast Central includes staff who work in a regional role within Libraries NI corporate services functions.

TABLE 3

Library	Number of people employed (Libraries NI)	Job Title
Andersonstown	3	1 x Senior Library Assistant 1 x Library Assistant 1 x Library Patrol Attendant
Ardoyne	6	1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Ballyhackamore	8	2 x Assistant Librarians 1 x Senior Library Assistant 4 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Ballymacarrett	3	1 x Senior Library Assistant 1 x Library Assistant 1 x Cleaner

Library	Number of people employed (Libraries NI)	Job Title
Belfast Central	81	1 x Business Manager 2 x Area Managers 3 x Senior Librarians 10 x Assistant Librarians 1 x Senior Executive Officer (Corporate Services) 8 x Senior Library Assistants 32 x Library Assistants 1 x Personal Assistant 1 x Clerical Officer 1 x Telephonist 2 x Clerk Typists 1 x Building Superintendent 2 x Mobile Library Drivers 1 x Library Driver Attendant 2 x Senior Library Attendants 5 x Library Attendants 8 x Cleaners
Chichester	6	1 Assistant Librarian 1 x Branch Library Manager 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Falls Road	5	1 x Branch Library Manager 3 x Library Assistants 1 Library Patrol Attendant
Finaghy	6	2 x Senior Library Assistants 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Grove	7	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Hollywood Arches	4	1 x Senior Library Assistant 2 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner

Library	Number of people employed (Libraries NI)	Job Title
Ligoniel	4	1 x Senior Library Assistant 1 x Library Assistant 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Lisburn Road	5	1 x Branch Library Manager 4 x Library Assistants
Oldpark	1	1 x Cleaner
Ormeau Road	7	1 x Senior Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 4 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Sandy Row	1	1 x Cleaner
Shankill	7	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 3 x Library Assistants 1 Library Patrol Attendant 1 Cleaner
Suffolk	5	1 x Senior Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 2 x Library Assistants 1 x Cleaner
Whiterock	6	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Branch Library Manager 2 x Library Assistants 1 x Library Patrol Attendant 1 x Cleaner
Whitewell	1	1 x Library Patrol Attendant
Woodstock	8	1 x Assistant Librarian 1 x Senior Library Assistant 5 x Library Assistants 1 Cleaner
Total	174	

iii (a) & (b) The following table shows a summarised version of the pay, grade and job description of each of the posts.

	Description	Grade	Salary Scale
1.	Cleaner	Clerical Officer	£13,589 – £14,733
2.	Assistant Librarian	Senior Clerical Officer	£15,570 – £16,991
3.	Branch Library Manager	Executive Officer	£17,161 - £21,519
4.	Community Librarian	Senior Executive Officer	£22,221 - £26,276
5.	Senior Librarian (Community)	Admin Officer	£27,849 - £30,011
6.	Senior Library Assistant (mobile services); Mobile Library Driver	Executive Officer	£17,161 – £21,519
7.	Library Patrol Assistant	Former Ancillary & General Staff	£12,488 - £13,190
8.	Personal Assistant	Executive Officer	£17,161 - £21,519
9.	Clerical Officer/Typist	Clerk Officer	£12,145 - £13,874
10.	Telephonist/ Receptionist	Clerical Officer	£12,145 - £13,874
11.	Library Attendant/ Assistant	Clerical Officer	£13,589 - £14,733
12.	Building Superintendant	Admin Officer	£27,849 - £30,011
13.	Senior Library Assistant	Executive Officer	£17,161 - £21,519
14.	Business Manager	Education Officer	£49,288 - £51,866
15.	Principal Officer - Frontline Services	Principal Officer	£38,961 - £41,616
16.	Administration Manager (Senior Executive Officer)	Senior Library Manager	£22,221 - £26,276
17.	Area Manager	Assistant Principal Officer	£35,430 - £38,042
18.	Maintenance Technician	Executive Officer	£17,161 – £21,519
19.	Senior Library Attendant	Scale 2	£14,733 - £15,444
20.	Library Driver Attendant	Scale Point 1C – Points 9 -11	£13,589 - £14,733

The individual salaries of members of staff have not been included since individuals could be identified and this information is protected by Data Protection legislation.

A full job description for each post is available in the Assembly Library.

Libraries NI

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to libraries previously controlled by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) but which are now under the control of Libraries NI, how much funding was allocated to each of these libraries when they were under the control of the BELB; and how much funding is currently allocated to each of these libraries.

(AQW 6376/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The spend attributed to each branch library in 2008/09 (by BELB) and in 2009/10 (by Libraries NI) was as follows:

	2008/09 spend (£)*	2009/10 spend (£)**
Belfast Central Library***	3,325,893	2,398,214
Andersonstown	67,544	73,488
Ardoyne	68,973	97,138
Ballyhackamore	155,618	161,417
Ballymacarrett	110,635	100,199
Chichester	129,861	153,743
Falls Road	129,148	126,909
Finaghy	120,735	124,666
Hollywood Road	127,184	130,351
Ligoniel	64,009	72,564
Lisburn Road	120,172	122,190
Oldpark	17,240	26,343
Ormeau	158,496	167,478
Sandy Row	21,159	17,402
Shankill	157,448	151,171
Suffolk	132,523	161,374
Whiterock	150,377	156,552
Whitewell	8,628	5,175
Woodstock	152,984	159,716
Grove Wellbeing Centre	170,652	149,807
Total	5,389,279	4,555,897
Mobile libraries	113,268	100,928

* The Chief Executive of BELB has advised me of the spend attributed to each branch library under his control as Accounting Officer in 2008/9.

** The Accounts for Libraries NI have not yet been finalised and audited. These draft figures may be subject to adjustment.

*** Most stock expenditure by BELB was coded to Belfast Central Library, as was some administration expenditure (e.g. Chief Librarian's salary, stock purchases, preparing invoices for payment etc.). In 2008/09 BELB reported expenditure of approximately £516,000 on stock purchases. The 2008/09 figure also includes £312,000 allocated for a redundancy scheme in March 2009. Libraries NI does not code stock to individual branches nor are central services or senior management team costs included.

Department of Education

Irish-medium Schools

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Education how many children from the Protestant community attend each Irish-medium school.

(AQW 6044/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Tá 23 Gaelscoil. Tá 5 dalta san iomlán acu atá taifeadta mar chuid den phobal Protastúnach; tá 2,630 dalta ón phobal Caitliceach; tá 9 dalta taifeadta mar 'Críostaí Eile'; agus tá 170 dalta a bhfuil a gcreidimh taifeadta mar 'anaithnid/ gan creideamh'.

There are 23 Irish medium schools. These have 5 pupils in total, recorded as being from the Protestant community; 2,630 pupils from the Catholic community; 9 pupils recorded as 'Other Christian'; and 170 pupils with religion recorded as 'not stated/none'.

There are 11 Irish medium units situated in English medium primary or post primary schools, with a total of 681 pupils: no pupils in those units were recorded as being Protestant; and, of the others, less than 5 have their religion recorded as something other than 'Catholic'.

Of the 435 children in funded places in the 35 Irish medium voluntary and private pre-school centres: 331 children have their religion recorded as Catholic; 96 children have their religion recorded as 'not stated/none'; and, 8 children have their religion recorded as 'Protestant' or 'Other Christian'.

Integrated Schools Enrolment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, to define what is meant by the 'longer term' in relation to the requirements under departmental regulations for integrated schools to achieve a 30% level of enrolment from the minority community in its catchment area.

(AQW 6091/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar AQW 5788/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 26 Márta 2010, inar mhínigh mé nach mór do scoileanna reatha atá ag athrú go stádas comhtháite (Comhtháite Rialaithe) an ábaltacht a léiriú chun 10% dá gcuid iontrála sa chéad bhliain, laistigh de rollú na scoile, a tharraingt ón phobal mionlaigh agus go bhféadfaidís íosmhéid de 30% a bhaint amach sa téarma níos faide.

I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 5788/10, published in the Official report on 26 March 2010 where I explained that existing schools transforming to integrated status (Controlled Integrated) must demonstrate the ability to achieve a minimum of 10% of their first year intake drawn from the minority tradition within the school's enrolment and the potential to achieve a minimum of 30% in the longer term.

It is important to recognise that transformation is a process of change with integration as the objective. When the policy on transformation was introduced it was anticipated that following transformation to integrated status my Department would carry out a formal review after 10 years.

Integrated Schools: Enrolment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, to list the integrated schools which have not achieved the required minority percentage enrolment for the last (i) seven years; (ii) six years; (iii) five years; (iv) four years; and (v) three years.

(AQW 6092/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach sa tábla seo thíos na scoileanna comhtháite nár tharraing 30% dá gcuid daltaí ón phobal mionlaigh le linn tréimhse de 10 mbliana ón bhliain 2000/01 go 2009/10. Leagtar amach sa tábla fosta céadatán na ndaltaí a tarraingíodh ón phobal mionlaigh.

The following table sets out the integrated schools which have not drawn 30% of their pupils from the minority community over the 10 year period from 2000/01 to 2009/10. The table also set out what percentage of pupils are drawn from the minority community

Schools which have transformed to integrated status should demonstrate the ability to achieve a minimum of 10% of their first year intake from the minority community and the potential to achieve 30% in the longer term.

Table showing actual % enrolment of pupils drawn from the minority community where the school is situated.

School	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01
Priory College	10.4	10.7	4.73	6.18	7.63	6.69	5.26	5.38	5.0	5.0
Fort Hill College	7.76	7.4	7.71	8.99	8.61	8.51	9.45	8.77	8.0	7.0
Bangor Central IPS	13.14	12.7	10.14	8.38	8.05	8.65	9.02	8.23	6.0	5.0
Round Tower IPS	26.03	25.8	24.02	15.58	25.0	20.31	17.7			
Portaferry IPS	24.62	20.5	21.79	25.00	16.47	27.38	19.77			
Strangford College	24.95	24.1	24.85	24.18	26.35	27.37				
Kilbroney IPS	23.15	23.8	20.0	20.21	22.34	26.09				
Glencraig IPS	17.35	16.40	15.35	12.83	12.8	10.16				
All Children's IPS	20.28	21.1	24.62	24.49	28.42					
Forge IPS	25.97	26.0	20.80	19.42						
Maine IPS	28.7	28.0	20.45	12.86						
Oakgrove Integrated College	26.53	24.6	28.83							
Drumragh College	27.20	26.0	27.35							

Integrated Schools: Enrolment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, what action her Department has taken in relation to each of the schools which failed to meet the 30% level of minority enrolment required for integrated status.

(AQW 6107/10)

Minister of Education: In five of the schools referred to in AQW 5788/10, Focused Inspections were carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate. In general Focussed Inspections found that schools which had transformed had successfully introduced an ethos of integration. The ethos of an integrated school is now considered as an integral part of the Inspection process.

Déanann na Roinn monatóireacht ar chothrom creidimh gach scoile comhtháite. I gcásanna nach bhfuil scoileanna in ann 30% dá gcuid daltaí a tharraingt as an phobal mionlaigh, iarrann an Roinn go nglacfaidh an Bord Gobharnóirí na bearta cuí agus go soláthrófar plean ina leagtar amach an dóigh a rachaidh an scoil in ngleic leis an easnamh.

My Department also monitors the religious balance in all integrated schools. Where schools are unable to draw 30% of their pupils from the minority community, the Department requests that the school's Board of Governors takes appropriate action and that a plan is provided setting out how the school will address the shortfall.

Integrated Schools: Enrolment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, how much additional funding each of the schools received in each of the years in which they failed to meet the 30% level of minority enrolment required for integrated status.

(AQW 6108/10)

Minister of Education: Faoin Fhoirmle Choitinn Mhaoinithe (FCM) um Bhainistíocht Áitiúil Scoileanna (BÁS), déileáiltear le scoileanna san earnáil rialaithe, lena n-áirítear na scoileanna sin san earnáil chomhtháite rialaithe, ar an dóigh chéanna agus a ndéileáiltear le scoileanna a bhfuil tréithe cosúla acu san earnáil faoi chothabháil. Ní chuirfear san áireamh cothrom creidimh ná cineál bainistíochta aon scoile nuair a chinntear a leithdháileadh faoin fhoirmle choitinn.

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula (CFF), schools in the controlled sector, including those in the controlled integrated sector, are treated exactly the same as those with similar characteristics in the maintained sector. No account is taken of the religious balance or management type of any school in determining its funding formula allocation.

All grant-aided schools are funded according to their relative need. Common monetary values have been set for each factor in the formula and these will determine the size of the budget for each school. All schools are funded on a consistent and equitable basis, regardless of their geographical location, management type or sector.

My Department does have a small budget which provides additional resources to transforming schools to assist with the process of transformation. Schools which transform to integrated status are only required to demonstrate the ability to achieve a 10% of their first year intake drawn from the minority community and the potential to achieve a minimum of 30% in the longer term. Details of additional funding allocated to transformed schools from this transformation budget in the years which they did not draw 30% of their enrolment from the minority community is in the table below.

School	00/01 £	01/02 £	02/03 £	03/04 £	04/05 £	05/06 £	06/07 £	07/08 £	08/09 £	09/10 £
Ballymoney CIPS										7,800
Bangor Central CIPS	43,641	42,560	25,014							
Cliftonville CIPS									4,071	24,048
Fort Hill CIC	26,000	23,750	25,000							
Glencraig CIPS					39,186	33,801	40,447	30,509		
Groarty CIPS										32,394
Kilbroney CIPS					23,000	34,959		4,044		
Portaferry CIPS				19,500	21,108					
Priory College	50,100	36,789	25,000							
Round Tower Integrated Primary				20,800	35,095	38,214	39,845	37,492	17,000	

School Building Projects

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5584/10, when she expects the area based planning process to be completed.

(AQW 6111/10)

Minister of Education: Beidh lánfhreagracht ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna, nuair a bhunófar é, as pleananna de réir ceantair a thabhairt chun tosaigh. San idirthréimhse, leanfaidh mo Roinn de bheith ag cur saincheisteanna sa cheantar aitiúil san áireamh agus tá sí ag obair go gar le gach údarás um scoileanna a bhainistiú chun cur chuige straitéiseach ar phleanáil a fhorbairt.

The Education and Skills Authority, when established, will have full responsibility for bringing forward area-based plans. In the interim period, my Department will continue to take account of local area issues and is working closely with all school managing authorities to develop a strategic approach to planning.

C2K Contract

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5865/10 (i) what aspects of C2K are outsourced and to which organisations; and (ii) when each is due for renewal.

(AQW 6129/10)

Minister of Education: Tá seirbhís bhainistihe Classroom 2000 (C2K) á sholáthar trí roinnt conarthaí ar a dtugtar Lots, a chumasaíonn seirbhísí le haghaidh scoileanna le tabhairt chun críche ó shainsholáthróirí. Maireann na conarthaí ar feadh tréimhse de 5-bliana, agus tá rogha acu ar thréimhse shínithe de suas le dhá bhliain.

The Classroom 2000 (C2k) managed service is being delivered through contracts known as Lots, which enable services for schools to be procured from specialist providers. The contracts are generally for a 5-year period, with the option of an extension period of up to two years.

The current C2k contracts are:

Lot 3 – post-primary and special schools' equipment and internal networks – the contract holder is Northgate and the renewal date is November 2010.

Lot 5 – wide area network and learning platform for all schools – the contract holder is Hewlett Packard and the renewal date is June 2011.

Lot 6 – primary schools' equipment and internal networks and additional laptops for all schools – the contract holder is Northgate and the renewal date is November 2011.

There is also a contract to provide schools with a management information system (SIMS) as part of their C2k network – the contract holder is Capita and the renewal date is March 2012.

C2k is currently working to procure replacement contracts for Lots 3 and 5, and the SIMS contract.

Funding for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education if funding for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum will be continued; and when this funding will be made available to the group.

(AQW 6168/10)

Minister of Education: Faigheann an Fóram don Ógra a chuid cistithe ó Chomhairle na Óige trína Scéim um Chistiú Bonneagair d'Eagraíocht Dheonach Réigiúnach don Ógra. D'eisigh Comhairle na hÓige litir ar 1 Aibreán 2010, inar thairg sí leithdháileadh eatramhach buiséid don chéad cheathrú den bhliain airgeadais 2010/11 don Fhóram don Ógra.

The Youth Forum receives its funding from the Youth Council through their Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation Infrastructure Funding Scheme. The Youth Council issued a letter on 1 April 2010 offering the Youth Forum an interim budget allocation for the first quarter of the 2010/11 financial year.

The Chief Executive of the Youth Council has advised that the Youth Council will make final decisions on its funding allocations for 2010/11 when it has been notified of its full youth budget for 2010/11, at which time the Youth Forum will be advised of its full budget allocation for the 2010/11 financial year.

Post-primary Education Planning in the Lurgan and Portadown Areas

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5583/10, to define the term 'considerable' in relation to the amount of correspondence between her Department and the Southern Education and Library Board.
(AQW 6170/10)

Minister of Education: Pursuant to my answer to AQW 5583/10.

Bíonn mo Roinn ag obair go gar le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt (BOLD) ar na scéimeanna ollchaipitil do Lurgan College agus do Portadown College. Le linn na trí bliana a chuaigh thart, rinneadh athmheas ar na Breithmheasa Eacnamíochta do Lurgan College ar chúig ócáid agus do Portadown College ar dhá ócáid. Le linn an phróisis de gach leasú ar na BE, chuaigh feidhmeannaigh mo Roinne i ngleic leis an BOLD i bhfoirm litreacha agus ríomhphost, go pearsanta agus trí ghuthán ar roinnt ócáidí maidir le gnéithe éagsúla de na breithmheasa agus de phleananna le haghaidh na scoileanna.

My Department has been working closely with the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) on the major capital schemes for both Lurgan College and Portadown College. Over the course of the last three years the Economic Appraisal for Lurgan College has been revised on five occasions and for Portadown College on two occasions. During the process of each revision of the EAs, my departmental officials have engaged with the SELB in the form of letters and emails, in person and by telephone on numerous occasions regarding various aspects of the appraisals and plans for the schools.

Primary Schools Enrolment

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of primary schools in each Education and Library Board Area that are below the minimum enrolment of 140 for urban areas and 105 for rural areas; and (ii) the number of primary schools closed down in each Education and Library Board area since 2007.
(AQW 6173/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH AN ENROLMENT¹ OF LESS THAN 140 FOR URBAN² AREAS AND 105 FOR RURAL AREAS BY ELB, 2009/10 AND SCHOOL CLOSURES FROM 2007

ELB	No of schools below enrolment thresholds	No of schools closed since 2007	No of schools closed since 2007 due to amalgamation
BELB	21	2	2 forming 1
WELB	97	4	2 forming 1
NEELB	87	1	6 forming 3
SEELB	37	12	2 forming 1
SELB	96	6	4 forming 2
Total	338	25	16 forming 8

Source: School census.

Note:

1. Enrolment thresholds relate to Year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Urban is defined as Belfast and Derry District Council areas. All other areas are considered to be rural.
3. Information provided includes details of two or more schools that have amalgamated to form one school

The enrolment thresholds of 140 and 105 for urban and rural primary schools respectively are included in the department's Sustainable Schools Policy which specifies six criteria to be used in assessing a school's educational viability. Schools are not closed automatically if enrolments fall under the thresholds but rather are considered on a case-by-case basis against the full set of criteria set out in the policy. The overriding consideration is the quality of education provided.

Education and Skills Authority

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to detail the costs, to date, of setting up the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 6175/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sonraí ar na costais go dtí seo a bhaineann le bunú an Údaráis um Oideachas agus Scileanna leagtha amach sa tábla thíos:

Details of the costs to date in respect of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority are set out in the table below:

	05/06 £'000	06/07 £'000	07/08 £'000	08/09 £'000	09/10* £'000	Total £'000
ESA Implementation Team	-	258	1,032	1,909	2,095	5,294
RPA Policy and Legislative Team	107	956	832	810	530	3,235
Total	107	1,214	1,864	2,719	684	8,529

Figures are disclosed as at 29 March 2010

Springhill Primary School, Belfast

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for a timescale for the commencement of work on a new build for Springhill Primary School, Belfast.

(AQW 6193/10)

Minister of Education: You will be aware that the review of all proposed major capital work projects, including that for Springhill Primary School, is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process.

Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú caipitil le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtárma.

The capital review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and the management of the schools estate. In the current economic climate the review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer. In light of this it is important that we validate the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term.

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework.

As area planning develops, these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

I am not, therefore, in a position at present to give details of a timescale for the proposed new build for Springhill Primary School.

Integrated Schools: Enrolment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, to detail by how much each school failed to meet the required minority percentage for integrated status in each of the consecutive years listed.

(AQW 6194/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach sa tábla seo thíos na scoileanna comhtháite nár tharraing 30% dá gcuid daltaí ón phobal mionlaigh le linn tréimhse de 10 mbliana ón bhliain 2000/01 go 2009/10. Leagtar amach sa tábla fosta céadatan na ndaltaí a tarraingíodh ón phobal mionlaigh.

The following table sets out the integrated schools which have not drawn 30% of their pupils from the minority community over the 10 year period from 2000/01 to 2009/10. The table also set out what percentage of pupils are drawn from the minority community

Schools which have transformed to integrated status should demonstrate the ability to achieve a minimum of 10% of their first year intake from the minority community and the potential to achieve 30% in the longer term.

TABLE SHOWING ACTUAL % ENROLMENT OF PUPILS DRAWN FROM THE MINORITY COMMUNITY WHERE THE SCHOOL IS SITUATED.

School	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01
Priory College	10.4	10.7	4.73	6.18	7.63	6.69	5.26	5.38	5.0	5.0
Fort Hill College	7.76	7.4	7.71	8.99	8.61	8.51	9.45	8.77	8.0	7.0
Bangor Central IPS	13.14	12.7	10.14	8.38	8.05	8.65	9.02	8.23	6.0	5.0
Round Tower IPS	26.03	25.8	24.02	15.58	25.0	20.31	17.7			
Portaferry IPS	24.62	20.5	21.79	25.00	16.47	27.38	19.77			
Strangford College	24.95	24.1	24.85	24.18	26.35	27.37				
Kilbroney IPS	23.15	23.8	20.0	20.21	22.34	26.09				
Glencraig IPS	17.35	16.40	15.35	12.83	12.8	10.16				
All Children's IPS	20.28	21.1	24.62	24.49	28.42					

School	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01
Forge IPS	25.97	26.0	20.80	19.42						
Maine IPS	28.7	28.0	20.45	12.86						
Oakgrove Integrated College	26.53	24.6	28.83							
Drumragh College	27.20	26.0	27.35							

Boards of Governors

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, to list the Boards of Governors of each of the schools.

(AQW 6195/10)

Minister of Education: Tá na baill de na Boird Ghobharnóirí liostaithe thíos, de réir cheantar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ina bhfuil siad suite.

The members of the Boards of Governors are listed below according to the education and library board area in which they are situated.

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

Cliftonville Controlled Integrated Primary School

Mr A Campbell

Ms D Carrigan

Reverend A Dorrian

Reverend D Leal

Reverend L Rosca

Ms M Thompson

Mr M Watley

Reverend Dr J Williamson

Forge Controlled Integrated Primary School

Ms M Andrews

Ms C Humphrey

Ms G Kerr

Mr P McCartney

Ms C McMullan

Mr J P Napier

Mr M Prendergast

Mr C Spence

Mr D Thompson

Ms D Toner

NORTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

Ballymoney Controlled Integrated Primary School

Mr J Brown

Ms R Carson

Mr J Donaghy

Ms B Herron

Mr B Knight

Reverend J Magowan

Mr S Montgomery

Ms H McConaghie

Mr P Sleet

Mr M Storey

Mr A Walker

Mr W Witherow

Carhill Controlled Integrated Primary School

Ms C Armour

Ms J Brownlow

Mr H Clyde

Mr T Heaney

Mr N Hyland

Miss B Kearney

Mr H Kearney

Ms M Mullan

Mr J McClenaghan

Mr A McQuillan

Ms S Russell

Ms R Ryan

Reverend P Whittaker

Ms M Williamson

Parkhall Controlled Integrated College

Miss R Aiken

Mr M Alexander

Mr W Carson

Mr P Connolly

Ms L Elkin

Mr S Greer

Mr S Hall

Mr D Hamilton

Ms J Kiskonis

Ms G Lavery

Reverend I McKee

Mr K McMeekin

Mr A Ritchie

Mr M Thompson

Mr A Watson

Round Tower Controlled Integrated Primary School

Ms F Allen

Ms B Black

Mr J Cosby

Mr S Davies

Mr D Ford

Mr S Greer

Miss C Heffron

Ms M Kirkpatrick

Dr S McBride

Reverend I McKee

Ms E Maconkey

Ms R Moran

Mr G Sloan

Maine Grant Maintained Integrated Primary School

Ms A Adair

Ms E Crowe

Mr J Hamilton

Ms D Houston

Ms L Kelly

Mr B Lawrence

Ms D Mallon

Ms H McCann

Ms C McCavana

Mr K McCavanna

Ms J McTaggart

Ms E Murray

Ms G O'Boyle

Ms E Robb

North Coast Grant Maintained Integrated College

Mr R Adams

Ms D Bacon

Professor D Eastwood

Ms C Guyer

Ms K Hunter

Mr A Kane

Mr J McCartney

Ms D McCombe
 Mr T McGonigle
 Ms C Mullin
 Mr S O'Hara
 Ms S Osborne
 Ms E Reynolds
 Dr L Stevens

**SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION
 AND LIBRARY BOARD**

**All Children's Controlled Integrated Primary
 School**

Mr P Corrigan
 Ms H Craig
 Mr D George
 Reverend Dr G Graham
 Mr M Houlahan
 Mr R McMahon
 Ms S McMullan
 Ms E McNeilly
 Ms J Rodgers
 Ms A Taylor
 Ms E Whitson
 Ms M Wilson
 Ms P Wilson
 Ms T Wishart

**Bangor Controlled Integrated Central
 Primary School**

Mr D Allen
 Ms N Ardill
 Ms M Dornan
 Ms R Connolly
 Cllr Ms R Dunlop
 Mr N J Grimshaw
 Miss S Hamilton
 Ms M E Holland

Ms V Hutchinson
 Mr D W Ireland
 Mr D McDermid
 Ms C McKenzie
 Mr T Scroggie
 Ms L Stevenson

Fort Hill Controlled Integrated College

Mr B Allison
 Reverend B Anderson
 Mr A Blythe
 Reverend J Brackenridge
 Mr H Gorman
 Miss C L'Estrange
 Mr D Mayers
 Dr R Montgomery
 Ms S Moran
 Ms K Playfair
 Ms F Steele
 Mr B J Stuart
 Miss M E Wilcox

Fort Hill Controlled Integrated Primary School

Reverend B Anderson
 Ms G Best
 Ms W Dennison
 Mr B Dooley
 Mr J Dumigan
 Mr D Dunlop
 Ms A Ferguson
 Mr C Grant
 Mr C Leitch
 Ms A McBratney
 Cllr Ms J Palmer
 Alderman P Porter
 Mr S White
 Mr S Weatherall

Glencraig Controlled Integrated Primary School

Mr J Beattie
 Ms A Bluementhal-Arlow
 Ms M E Brown
 Ms S Cheetham
 Mr B J Delaney
 Miss G Duncan
 Ms E Furbank
 Dr B Gough
 Mr R Gray
 Ms L Heatherley
 Ms N Magrath
 Mr P McMaw
 Mr S Rutherford
 Mr J Wright

Portaferry Controlled Integrated Primary School

Ms N Allen
 Ms N Aston
 Cllr J Boyle
 Ms J Doherty
 Dr M Doyle
 Reverend D Gray
 Alderman K McCarthy
 Ms S McGuinness
 Ms D McKeating
 Dr D Peacock
 Mr A Ritchie
 Ms J Taggart
 Reverend G Withers

Priory Controlled Integrated College

Ms L Allen
 Mr S Clarke
 Mr R Couser

Ms L P Douglas
 Dr S Farry
 Ms S Gardiner
 Ms C Hart
 Mr J C Langtry
 Ms N Lynagh
 Mr H Minion
 Ms S Murray
 Ms D Nelson
 Ms E M Robinson
 Ms F Todd

Strangford Grant Maintained Integrated College

Dr S Adair
 Mr J Allen
 Ms V Bryson
 Ms L Calvin
 Ms H Cousins
 Ms R Dennison
 Mr M Ferguson
 Mr G Flynn
 Ms K Hannah
 Ms A McGimpsey
 Mr B McGowan-Smyth
 Mr P McIntyre
 Ms H Strain

SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD**Kilbroney Controlled Integrated Primary School**

Ms F Boyle
 Mr J Cavan
 Mr P Conway
 Ms J Corkey
 Mr S Donaldson
 Reverend D Jameson

Mr P Leneghan

Ms E Newell

Ms C Payne

Ms N Quinn

Ms D Sands

Reverend D Somerville

Portadown Grant Maintained Integrated Primary School

Mr J Bustard

Mr I Chapman

Mr J Cullen

Mr P Devlin

Ms S Edgar

Ms K Foy

Mr B Friar

Ms F Gallagher

Mr M Hogg

Ms T Johnston

Ms B McCann

Mr C McSherry

Mr P Njoroge

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA**Groarty Controlled Integrated Primary School**

Mr J Arbuckle

Ms K Brown

Ms M Cowan

Mr D Crockett

Mr G Elder

Ms D Gillon

Ms T Harrison

Ms P Jackson

Ms T Keys

Ms M McKittrick

Dr R McLaughlin

Ms B Moran

Ms N Porter

Drumragh Grant Maintained Integrated College

Mr I Booth

Mr E Bullick

Mr R Collins

Ms N Grant

Mr D Hamilton

Ms I Kirk

Mr M McBride

Ms E McCaffery

Ms G McKenna

Ms A Millar

Mr K Murnaghan

Mr N Stewart

Mr S Webb

Oakgrove Grant Maintained Integrated College

Mr J Baird

Ms R Barrow

Ms T Blackburn

Mr C M Cavanagh

Mr R Cowan

Ms W Crothers

Ms M Forester

Mr P Haslam

Mr D Hasson

Mr J Lavery

Dr D Lee

Mr T Lindsay

Mr B McMurray

Mr B Montgomery

Ms B Webster

Oakgrove Grant Maintained Integrated Primary School

Mr I Bennett

Ms M Cowan

Ms S Curley

Mr A Donaghey

Ms G Fraser

Mr J Gray

Ms J Greaves

Ms K Lavery

Ms I Lindsay

Ms S McCallion

Ms A McMonagle

Mr H Montgomery

Mr S Page

Ms C Ryan

Mr C Schnurr

Mr T Webster

Integrated Schools: Enrolment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5788/10, to detail the annual budgetary deficit or surplus of each of the schools which failed to meet the required minority percentage for integrated status in each of the consecutive years listed.

(AQW 6196/10)

Minister of Education: Is í an bhliain is déanaí dona bhfuil sonraí ar barrachas carnach/ easnamh carnach le fáil ná an bhliain 2008/09. Soláthraítear sa tábla thíos an staid um barrachas carnach/ easnamh carnach do na blianta riachtanacha airgeadais do gach scoil ar tagraíodh dóibh sa fhreagra a tugadh ar AQW 5788/10 (Freagra Ceartaithe).

The latest full financial year for which cumulative surplus/deficit data is available is 2008/09. The table below provides the cumulative surplus/deficit position for the requisite financial years in relation to each of the schools collectively referred to in the answer provided for AQW 5788/10 (Corrected Answer).

CUMULATIVE SURPLUS/DEFICIT POSITION IN EACH OF THE FINANCIAL YEARS (£)

School Name	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Bangor Central IPS	51,534	66,142	111,301	73,027	51,723	33,353	75,840	109,054	155,414	166,518
Priory Integrated College	63,131	15,176	-2,992	13,722	-74,206	-133,206	-106,013	-41,904	-38,230	-95,281
Fort Hill Integrated College	248,125	448,835	530,817	726,411	866,971	960,770	913,003	902,672	965,004	953,801
Round Tower IPS (i)				1,246	4,382	6,263	59,286	57,318	40,884	24,636
Portaferry IPS				74,741	94,110	108,807	93,122	97,180	88,922	41,622
Glencraig IPS (ii)					-46,732	-26,314	-39,923	14,885	52,339	100,797
Kilbroney IPS					81,248	92,253	101,001	86,113	73,658	86,571
Strangford Integrated College					96,656	118,494	128,054	170,019	175,515	142,712
All Children's IPS						-4,720	-28,024	-30,664	-24,847	-30,978
Forge IPS							49,685	78,913	135,924	146,963
Maine IPS							63,561	82,184	107,907	71,306
Oakgrove Integrated College								-35,125	-53,184	-79,231
Drumragh Integrated College								73,902	58,097	-16,730
Cliftonville IPS (iii)									62,806	6,225
Oakgrove IPS									81,610	87,028
Groarty IPS										50,607
Ballymoney IPS (vi)										-13,814

Footnotes:
(i) Round Tower IPS Transformed to Controlled Integrated Status 2003
(ii) Glencraig IPS Transformed to Controlled Integrated Status 2004
(iii) Cliftonville IPS Transformed to Controlled Integrated Status 2008
(iv) Parkhall Int College Transformed to Controlled Integrated Status 2008
(v) Fort Hill IPS transformed to Controlled Integrated Status 2008
(vi) Ballymoney IPS Transformed to Controlled Integrated Status 2009

Vandalism of Schools

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Education how much her Department spent in 2009 on repairing damage caused by vandalism of schools.

(AQW 6199/10)

Minister of Education: Meastar go sealadach gurbh é an costas a bhí ar dhamáiste i scoileanna, a raibh loitiméireacht ina chúis leis, a dheisiú ná £1.3m sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10. Níorbh eol an figiúr deireanach go dtí go dtabharfar na cuntais bhliantúla chun críche i lár mhí na Bealtaine.

The cost of repairing damage caused by vandalism in schools in 2009/10 financial year is provisionally estimated to be £1.3. The final figure will not be known until the annual accounts are completed in mid May.

Youth Service Provision

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been allocated to youth service provision in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6225/10)

Minister of Education: Le linn na 5 bliana a chuaigh thart, tá cistiú soláthraithe ag an Roinn do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlaine an Oirdheiscirt, d'Iontaobhas an Phrionsa agus do Thairg Seirbhís de do Dheoin Féin Anois (roimhe seo An Ghníomhaireacht Forbartha Deonaigh) do sholáthar seirbhíse don Ógra i dtoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh.

Over the past 5 years, the Department has provided funding to the South Eastern Education and Library Board, the Prince's Trust and Volunteer Now (formerly the Volunteer Development Agency) for youth service provision in the North Down Constituency area.

The Chief Executive/Directors of these organisations have provided the following information about funding for youth service provision in the Constituency in each of the last 5 years:

	2005/06 (£)	2006/07 (£)	2007/08 (£)	2008/09 (£)	2009/10 (£)
Resource	468,881	470,601	495,387	523,600	509,641
Capital	-	-	-	121,198	30,254
Total	468,881	470,601	495,387	644,798	539,895

In addition to the figures above, the Department also funds the Youth Council, which allocates funding to Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations to provide support for voluntary youth organisations. Due to the regional nature of this funding, it would not be possible to provide details on the amount used in an individual Constituency area.

The Department has also allocated capital funding to some voluntary youth sector organisations in the Constituency during this period. However, this information is not held in the format required by this request and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Business Studies, Post Graduate Certificate in Education

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education what steps her Department has taken to introduce a Business Studies, Post Graduate Certificate in Education.

(AQW 6229/10)

Minister of Education: I mí na Samhna 2009, bhuail feidhmeannaigh na Roinne ina nduine agus ina nduine lenár soláthróirí oiliúna múinteoireachta tosaigh (OMT) chun plé a dhéanamh ar chinneadh bliantúil na n-iontógálacha OMT agus ar sholáthar iomchuí cúrsa. Le linn na gcrúinnithe seo, d'ardaigh Ollscoil Uladh saincheist de Theastas Iarchéime san Oideachas (TIO) i Staidéir Ghnó.

In November 2009, Department officials met separately with our local initial teacher education (ITE) providers to discuss the annual determination of ITE intakes and appropriate course provision. During the course of these meetings, the University of Ulster raised the issue of a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in Business Studies.

Currently the only route to becoming a teacher of Business Studies here is through a 4-year Bachelor of Education course, provided at both Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College. The introduction of a PGCE in Business Studies would need to take account of existing provision and evidence from the 2009/10 Teacher Vacancy Return that there is currently an adequate supply of Business Studies teachers here.

The Department will consider this issue carefully whilst taking forward the out-workings of the Teacher Education Review.

Classroom Assistants

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail the financial arrangements her Department has in place to provide an income for classroom assistants during the school summer holiday period. **(AQW 6250/10)**

Minister of Education: Ní hé mo Roinn fostóir na gcúntóirí ranga mar tá na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus na Scoileanna Deonacha Gramadaí/ na Scoileanna Comhtháite Deontaschúnta freagrach as an dualgas seo. Mar sin de, d'fhorbródh an fostóir aon tograí chun ioncam a thabhairt do na cúntóirí ranga sin atá fostaithe ar chonarthaí scoil-bhlíana.

My Department is not the employer for classroom assistants rather this function is undertaken by the Education and Library Boards and the Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated Schools. As such therefore any proposals to provide an income to those classroom assistants currently employed on term time contracts would be developed by the employer.

I can confirm however that the Joint Negotiating Council agreement in 2001 made new provision for all classroom assistants employed on term time contracts by the Education and Library Boards.

Under the agreement staff had a number of options:

- They could transfer to a 52 week contract of employment, thereby avoided the unpaid periods, particularly during the summer holidays;
- Transfer to a 52 week contract of employment but retain the option to request periods of unpaid leave during any extended school closures – such requests would be subject to the normal approval arrangements but permission would not be unreasonably withheld;
- Retain their existing contract of employment without change;
- Opt for an extension of two weeks paid work based on the existing number of contractual weekly hours.

Classroom Assistants

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education what representations she has made to the Executive or other Departments to ensure that classroom assistants receive an income during the school summer holiday period. **(AQW 6251/10)**

Minister of Education: Ní hé mo Roinn fostóir na gcúntóirí ranga mar tá na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus na Scoileanna Deonacha Gramadaí/ na Scoileanna Comhtháite Deontaschúnta freagrach as an dualgas seo. Mar sin de, d'fhorbródh an fostóir aon tograí chun ioncam a thabhairt do na cúntóirí ranga sin atá fostaithe ar chonarthaí scoil-bhlíana.

My Department is not the employer for classroom assistants rather this function is undertaken by the Education and Library Boards and the Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated Schools. As

such therefore any proposals to provide an income to those classroom assistants currently employed on term time contracts would be developed by the employer.

I can confirm however that the Joint Negotiating Council agreement in 2001 made new provision for all classroom assistants employed on term time contracts by the Education and Library Boards.

Under the agreement staff had a number of options:

- They could transfer to a 52 week contract of employment, thereby avoided the unpaid periods, particularly during the summer holidays;
- Transfer to a 52 week contract of employment but retain the option to request periods of unpaid leave during any extended school closures – such requests would be subject to the normal approval arrangements but permission would not be unreasonably withheld;
- Retain their existing contract of employment without change;

Opt for an extension of two weeks paid work based on the existing number of contractual weekly hours.

Job Evaluations within the Education and Library Board

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the equality implications of delays in processing job evaluations within the Education and Library Board structure.

(AQW 6255/10)

Minister of Education: Rinneadh an Scéim phost-mheastóireachta, a bhí déanta ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, ar bhealach cothrom a bhí i gcomhréir leis an chomhaontú le Foireann Ceardchumainn sa bhliain 1995.

The Job Evaluation Scheme, which has been undertaken by the Education & Library Boards, has been carried out in fair and equitable manner consistent with the 1995 agreement with Trade Union Side.

The Scheme has been implemented across the five Boards on the basis of a rolling programme of evaluations in line with Boards' prioritised needs. As part of the process it was agreed that staff should not be disadvantaged because of their place in the job evaluation queue and that any regrading would be automatically backdated. As a result regrading is being backdated to 1 January 1995 for former non-manual staff and to 1 January 2002 for former manual staff (or the date the post holder commenced the duties of the post).

I have expressed my concerns about the time taken to complete this process to the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards and instructed them to ensure that all outstanding cases are processed without delay.

Primary School Funding

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education how much funding each primary school in the Colin area received for (i) special needs provision; and (ii) children with dyslexia, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 6283/10)

Minister of Education: Cuireadh Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt (BOLOD) comhairle dom gur mar seo a leanas atá an cistiú a soláthraíodh i ngach bliain de na dhá bhliain airgeadais a chuaigh thart le haghaidh na bpáistí a sainaitníodh go raibh soláthar oideachais speisialta de dhíth orthu, ag gach céim den Chód Cleachtais de Shainaitint agus Measúnacht ar Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais, i ngach bunscoil i gCeantar Athnuachan Comharsanachta Cholainn:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that funding provided for the numbers of children identified as requiring special needs provision, at all stages of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, in each primary school in the Colin Neighbourhood Renewal Area in each of the last two financial years is as follows:-

	2008/09 (£)	2009/10 (£)
St. Luke's Primary School	101,744	99,377
St. Mark's Primary School	146,337	123,521
The Good Shepherd Primary School	176,378	159,677
St. Kieran's Primary School	200,356	195,949
Scoil na Faiseoige	36,212	30,753

The Chief Executive advised that the above figures do not include additional support provided through the Board's Outreach Service which operates from Beechlawn School throughout the SEELB or any funding which may have been provided through the Integrated Development Fund.

It is not possible to specify the amount of funding in respect of children with dyslexia as this service is provided by the Board's Outreach Service.

Education and Skills Authority

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education for a timescale for the introduction of the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 6293/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé di ar AQW 6227/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 23 Aibreán 2010.

I refer the member to the answer I provided her to AQW 6227/10, published in the Official Report on 23 April 2010.

Retention of Grammar Schools

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Education if she is giving any consideration to the demand from the rest of the UK for the retention of grammar schools when considering options for the post primary sector.

(AQW 6302/10)

Minister of Education: Ní chreidim go bhfuil roghnú acadúil feiliúnach do chóras oideachais atá nua-aimseartha agus oiriúnach don fheidhm in Éirinn nó in áit ar bith eile ar an domhan. Creidim sa chomhionannas agus gur chóir go bhfaigheadh gach páiste an deis chun a gcumas a bhaint amach .

I do not consider that there is any place for academic selection within a modern and fit for purpose education system in Ireland or anywhere in the world.

In believe in equality and that every child should get the opportunity to reach her or his potential.

The proposed area based approach to planning which will be taken forward by the ESA, when established, will enable stakeholders to input into the area planning process. This will ensure that there is a range of different types of schools, each contributing to delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum to meet the needs of all young people in the local area.

Newbuild for Ebrington Primary School, Londonderry

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Education for a timescale for the newbuild for (i) Ebrington Primary School, Londonderry; and (ii) all other newbuilds for schools in the Foyle and Londonderry area.

(AQW 6303/10)

Minister of Education: There are currently nine projects in the Foyle and East Derry constituencies included in my Department's major capital programme. Construction work is currently ongoing on three of these projects, namely, (i) St Cecilia's College, Creggan; (ii) St Mary's College, Creggan; and (iii) Lisnagelvin P.S. Both colleges are due to be completed in September 2010. The new school building for

Lisnagelvin PS. was completed in early April 2010 with the remaining demolition / site works due to be completed in July 2010.

Tá na sé thionscadal eile, lena n-áirítear an tionscadal do Ebrington P.S., ag céimeanna éagsúla den phróiseas pleanála. Mar is eol duit, tá an t-athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil atá ag an chéim pleanála ar siúl go fóill agus tá mo chuid feidhmeannach ag obair chun an próiseas seo a chríochnú. Mar gheall ar an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an tasc seo, áfach, is riachtanach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar lánbhreithniú do gach tionscadal, sula ndéantar aon chinneadh. Níl mé in ann, mar sin, dátaí sonracha le haghaidh chríochnú an athbhreithnithe nó le haghaidh dhul chun cinn aon scéime ar leith sa toadhchaí atá fós ag an chéim pleanála a thabhairt faoi láthair.

The remaining six projects, including Ebrington P.S., are all at various stages of the planning process. As you are aware, however, a review of all capital projects still in planning is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project before a decision is taken. I am not therefore, in a position at present to give specific dates for completion of the review or future progress of any particular project still in planning.

I CAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch Primary School

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Education if she will reverse her decision to close the I CAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch Primary School which provides specialist speech and language therapy for 20 children.

(AQW 6305/10)

Minister of Education: I have made no decision to close the ICAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch Primary School.

The Department of Education (DE) does not provide direct funding to services such as the ICAN Early Years Centre. The Department distributes to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) a block grant each year from which they fund a range of services, including special education. This funding is distributed on an equitable basis to Boards who have a statutory duty to identify and make provision for children with special educational needs. They are best placed to direct those funds to local provision that most effectively meets the special educational needs of children in their Board area.

In 2006/07 DE was able to release the sum of £83k to each of the ELBs to relieve pressures on special educational needs (SEN) within each Board area. This was to be spent entirely at the discretion of the ELB in meeting local needs and it was the decision of the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) to direct that sum towards the funding of ICAN. It was also the SEELB's decision, in conjunction with the South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, to provide funding in the succeeding years.

I have visited the Centre and have seen for myself the work they are doing for young children. It is generally accepted that early intervention to address barriers to learning can make a difference to life chances and may result in lower spend at later stages.

D'iarr mé ar an BOLOD comhairle a thabhairt dom ar straitéis an Bhoird chun riachtanais gach páiste a bhfuil deacrachtaí urlabhra agus cumarsáide acu i luathbhlianta a bhaint amach, lena n-áirítear riachtanais na bpáistí sin atá ag freastal ar Ionad ICAN faoi láthair, agus scríobh mé chuig an Aire Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteacht an Phobail faoin chaoi a bhféadfadh ár n-earnálacha a obair le chéile i dtaca leis an chineál soláthair seo.

I have asked the SEELB to advise me of the Board's strategy to meet the needs of all children with speech language and communication difficulties in early years, including those currently attending the ICAN Centre and to meet with me to discuss this issue. I have also written to the Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety about how our sectors might continue to work together in relation to this type of provision.

Teacher Sickness Rates

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the teacher sickness rates in (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6335/10)

Minister of Education: Mionsonraítear sa tábla thíos an t-eolas a iarradh: -

The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Primary	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
No of Teachers	1725	2218	1770	1498	1644
Sick days	322	312	308	295	300
Average	5.36	7.11	5.75	5.08	5.48
Post Primary					
No of Teachers	1576	1807	1751	1696	1909
Sick Days	270	269	261	255	253
Average	5.84	6.72	6.71	6.65	7.55

Pupil Absenteeism

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of pupil absenteeism in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6336/10)

Minister of Education: Taifeadtar freastal de réir seisiúin leathlae- seisiún maidine agus seisiún tráthnóna. Bailíodh eolas ar fhreastal daltaí den chéad uair sa Daonáireamh Scoile i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2008 agus, mar sin de, níl eolas ar fáil ach do na blianta acadúla 2007/08 agus 2008/09.

Attendance is measured in half day sessions, morning and afternoon. Pupil level attendance was first collected in the annual School Census in October 2008 and therefore is only available for the 2007/08 and 2008/09 academic years.

The absence rate for pupils attending primary schools in the North Down constituency in 2007/08 was 4.8% of the total half days. The corresponding rate for all primary schools was 5.2%. In the same year, post-primary schools in North Down had an absence rate of 7.9% of the total half days, compared with 7.8% in all post-primary schools.

In 2008/09, the absence rate for pupils attending primary schools in the North Down constituency was 4.7% of the total half days. The corresponding rate for all primary schools was 5.1%. In post-primary schools in North Down, the absence rate was 7.6% in 2008/09, compared with 7.7% in all post-primary schools.

Whitehouse Primary School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education why the re-build of Whitehouse Primary School has been subject to further delay despite the Ministers' statement in July 2009 that her Department was working to progress the planned new school as quickly as possible.

(AQW 6344/10)

Minister of Education: I recognise the difficulties facing the pupils and teachers of Whitehouse P.S. following the arson attack in July 2009.

It is critical that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework and adheres to the department's statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on

the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, the Irish Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework. This is why I have commissioned a review of all capital projects to inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate. It will ensure that we put the right size and type of school in the right location to meet the needs of children and young people.

I want to build new schools, including that for White House Primary School, however the rate at which we can do this is dependent on the available resources. The Education budget as you will be aware is set by the Executive. In my budget statement on 21 April 2010 I highlighted the challenging financial position being faced. My Department has tough decisions to make and I look forward to support from all parties when I make bids for additional funding during in year monitoring rounds.

I have to emphasis that I have not withdrawn funding for any school. However currently, and inevitably in the future, finance will be limited and difficult decisions will be the order of the day as the impact of the reduced capital budget takes hold.

Given the challenges we face, I am not in a position to give specific dates for completion of the review or to give future progress on any particular scheme at this time.

St Paul's College, Kilrea

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education whether she intends to increase the intake of first year students to St Paul's College, Kilrea, to enable it to meet demand.

(AQW 6364/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an próiseas um páistí a chur in iarbhunscoileanna faoi bhealach faoi láthair agus ní chríochnófar é go dtí go gcuirfidh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne litreacha chuig tuismitheoirí le cur in iúl dóibh cén scoil ar cuireadh a gcuid páistí inti. Le linn an phróisis seo, fuair an Roinn iarratas ó Choláiste Naomh Pól, Cill Ria, maidir le líon na n-iontrálacha a mhéadú ó 54 go 67 don scoilbhliain 2010/11 agus tá an togra seo faoi bhreathnú faoi láthair.

The process for placing children in post primary schools is currently underway and will not be complete until Education and Library Boards issue letters to parents on 28 May 2010 advising in which post-primary school their child has been placed in. During the process, the Department has received a request from St Paul's College, Kilrea to increase the admissions number from 54 to 67 for the 2010/11 school year and this is currently under consideration.

When a school is oversubscribed with applications the Board of Governors is required to apply its published admissions criteria. Responsibility for drawing up and applying the admissions criteria rests entirely with the Board of Governors of each school and reflects the Governors' priorities for admission to that school. The Department's power to grant temporary variations in this context can be used to alleviate short term pressures in an area as a whole; however, the Department will not generally increase the admissions number of one particular school where there remain places available in other suitable schools in the area. The medium to longer term position must also be considered in the context of post-primary transfer policy, area based planning of post-primary provision, and any capital projects which may necessitate a review of the school's long term enrolment figure.

Preparatory Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how much financial assistance her Department has given to preparatory schools in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6393/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach sa tábla thíos an cistiú tarmligthe agus an cistiú neamhtharmligthe a sholáthair mo Roinn do ranna ullmhúcháin i scoileanna gramadaí i ngach bliain de na blianta airgeadais ó 2005-06 go 2009-10.

The total amounts of delegated and non-delegated funding which my department provided to preparatory departments of grammar schools in each of the financial years 2005-06 to 2009-10 is shown in the table below.

Financial Year	Total £
2005-06	1,864,741
2006-07	1,993,278
2007-08	2,051,441
2008-09	2,135,926
2009-10	2,220,889

Footnote:

- (i) The above figures do not include non-delegated funding information in relation to the preparatory departments attached to the three controlled grammar schools. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that it is unable to accurately identify non-delegated funding or expenditure for the preparatory departments of controlled grammar schools as it is contained in the overall funding and expenditure of the host grammar schools.

After School Homework Club

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to list the schools in the North Down constituency which provide an after school homework club, and of these, how many have a teacher present.

(AQW 6396/10)

Minister of Education: Information on after schools clubs is not routinely collected. However, the Department's Extended Schools (ES) programme provides a recognised funding stream for those schools serving the most deprived and disadvantaged areas to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the traditional school day and this can include homework clubs.

Sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10, tugadh cistiú do 2 scoil i dtoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh tríd an pholasaf Scoileanna Sínithe. Dhearbhaigh an Priómhfeidhmeannach ar an BOLOD go dtairgeann an dá scoil seo, Millisle Primary School agus Kilcooley Primary School, Beannchar, imeachtaí taobh amuigh den scoil chun tacú le foghlaim a dtacaítear leo ag cistiú Scoileanna Sínithe.

In the 2009/10 financial year, Extended Schools funding issued to 2 schools in the North Down constituency. The Chief Executive of the SEELB has confirmed that both of these schools, Millisle Primary School and Kilcooley Primary School, Bangor offer after school learning support activities supported by Extended Schools funding.

Free Nursery Places

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children were refused a free nursery place in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6397/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt (BOLOD) in iúl gur mar seo a leanas atá líon na bpáistí ar diúltaíodh áit shaor ar naíscóil dóibh ag deireadh an phróisís iontrála ag deireadh mhí Aibreáin/ ag tús mhí na Bealtaine, i dtoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh i ngach bliain de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart:

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) have advised that the number of children refused a free nursery place, at the conclusion of the admissions process in late April / early May, in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	Number Unplaced
2005/06	8
2006/07	52
2007/08	43
2008/09	37
2009/10	39

They have also advised that many children who are unplaced at the conclusion of the admissions process secure a free nursery place before the start of the school year in September.

Boards of Governors

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to list the schools which have not had the Boards of Governors reconstituted in the last 12 months.

(AQW 6421/10)

Minister of Education: Is iad seo a leanas na scoileanna nach ndearnadh cleachtadh athbhunaithe orthu sa 12 mhí a chuaigh thart:

The schools which have not undergone a reconstitution exercise in the last 12 months are as follows:

Grant Maintained Integrated Schools

Acorn Integrated Primary

Blackwater Integrated College

Braidside Integrated Primary

Bridge Integrated Primary

Cedar Integrated Primary

Corran Integrated Primary

Cranmore Integrated Primary

Drumlins Integrated Primary

Drumragh Integrated College

Enniskillen Integrated Primary

Erne Integrated College

Hazelwood Integrated Primary

Hazelwood Integrated College

Integrated College, Dungannon

Lagan Integrated College

Loughview Integrated Primary

Maine Integrated Primary

Malone Integrated College

Mill Strand Integrated Primary

Millenium Integrated Primary
Newbridge Integrated College
North Coast Integrated College
Oakgrove Integrated College
Oakgrove Integrated Primary
Oakwood Integrated Primary
Omagh Integrated Primary
Phoenix Integrated Primary
Portadown Integrated Primary
Roe Valley Integrated Primary
Rowandale Integrated Primary
Saints and Scholars Integrated Primary
Shimna Integrated College
Slemish Integrated College
Sperrin Integrated College
Spires Integrated Primary
Strangford Integrated College
Ulidia Integrated College
Windmill Integrated Primary

Voluntary Grammar Schools

Ballymena Academy
Campbell College
Dominican College
Hunterhouse College
St Patrick's Academy
St Patrick's Grammar
Victoria College

Boards of Governors

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many Boards of Governors of schools (i) have been newly reconstituted in the last 12 months; and (ii) remain unreconstituted.

(AQW 6423/10)

Minister of Education: Rinneadh cleachtadh athbhuanaithe ar 1,166 scoil- scoil rialaithe, scoil faoi chothabháil agus scoil dheonach ghramadaí sa 12 mhí a chuaigh thart. Tá na nósanna imeachta críochnaithe d'fhormhór na scoileanna, ach tá céatadán beag de cheapacháin ghobarnóirí ar leith fós le dearbhú.

A total of 1,166 controlled, maintained and voluntary grammar schools have been undergoing reconstitution in the last 12 months. The procedures for most of the schools have now been completed with a small percentage of individual governor appointments remaining to be confirmed.

There is a total of 45 grant maintained integrated and voluntary grammar schools which were not due to be reconstituted in the last 12 months.

Emotional Well-being in Schools

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4197/10, to detail the level of investment in each of the activities undertaken by schools that contribute to positive emotional health in (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; and (iii) 2009/10.

(AQW 6454/10)

Minister of Education: Schools undertake a wide range of activities which contribute to positive emotional health. My Department does not hold details of the level of investment that schools make in each of the activities they undertake.

State Funded Nursery Places

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many state funded nursery places there are currently in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 6478/10)

Minister of Education: Tá 856 áit chistithe réamhscoile i dtoghcheantar Dhún Thuaidh faoi láthair: tá 546 acu i naíscoileanna reachtúla agus in aonaid reachtúla naíolainne atá ceangailte le bunscoileanna; agus tá 310 acu san earnáil dheonach/phríobháideach.

There are currently 856 funded pre-school places in the North Down constituency: 546 in statutory nursery schools and units attached to primary schools; and 310 in the voluntary/private sector.

Whitehouse Primary School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education (i) if she is aware that the temporary accommodation in place for Whitehouse Primary School, within Newtownabbey High School, has been described as 'not fit for purpose' and cannot be considered a permanent solution; and (ii) what steps she intends to take to urgently address this issue.

(AQW 6486/10)

Minister of Education: Ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt do na deacrachtaí atá roimh dhaltaí agus roimh mhúinteoirí Whitehouse PS. tar éis ionsaí coirloiscithe i mí Iúil 2009. Ní heol dom aon tuairisc ina gcuirtear síos ar an chóiríocht shealadach atá i bhfeidhm mar "neamhoiriúnach don fheidhm".

I would like to acknowledge the difficulties facing the pupils and teachers of Whitehouse PS. following the arson attack in July 2009. I am not aware of any report that refers to the temporary accommodation in place as being "not fit for purpose".

The accommodation currently being provided at Newtownabbey H.S., supplemented by the provision of new temporary accommodation, is not being considered as a permanent accommodation solution.

The Education budget as you will be aware is set by the Executive. In my budget statement on 21 April 2010 I highlighted the challenging financial position being faced. My Department has tough decisions to make and I look forward to support from all parties when I make bids for additional funding during in year monitoring rounds. All capital projects including Whitehouse PS. need to be considered against the policy framework in place and in light of the budget available.

In light of this situation, I cannot give any commitment at this time to when construction work on the new school building for Whitehouse PS. will commence. I am fully aware of the difficult circumstances relating to the Whitehouse project and do not believe there is anything to be gained by a visit at this time.

Whitehouse Primary School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education whether she will visit Whitehouse Primary School and the adjoining nursery unit, as a matter of urgency, in order to ascertain the limitations of the temporary arrangements and accommodation on the pupils and staff.

(AQW 6487/10)

Minister of Education: Ba mhaith liom aitheantas a thabhairt do na deacrachtaí atá roimh dhaltaí agus roimh mhúinteoirí Whitehouse PS. tar éis ionsaí coirloiscithe i mí Iúil 2009. Ní heol dom aon tuairisc ina gcuirtear síos ar an chóiríocht shealadach atá i bhfeidhm mar “neamhoiriúnach don fheidhm”.

I would like to acknowledge the difficulties facing the pupils and teachers of Whitehouse PS. following the arson attack in July 2009. I am not aware of any report that refers to the temporary accommodation in place as being “not fit for purpose”.

The accommodation currently being provided at Newtownabbey H.S., supplemented by the provision of new temporary accommodation, is not being considered as a permanent accommodation solution.

The Education budget as you will be aware is set by the Executive. In my budget statement on 21 April 2010 I highlighted the challenging financial position being faced. My Department has tough decisions to make and I look forward to support from all parties when I make bids for additional funding during in year monitoring rounds. All capital projects including Whitehouse PS. need to be considered against the policy framework in place and in light of the budget available.

In light of this situation, I cannot give any commitment at this time to when construction work on the new school building for Whitehouse PS. will commence. I am fully aware of the difficult circumstances relating to the Whitehouse project and do not believe there is anything to be gained by a visit at this time.

Whitehouse Primary School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to explain the delay in answering the two-day priority written Assembly Question, AQW 6344/10, due for answer on 23 April 2010.

(AQW 6520/10)

Minister of Education: Is saincheist thábhachtach í seo agus b'éigean dom mo bhreathnú iomlán a thabhairt do na saincheisteanna sula dtabharfainn freagra duit.

This is an important matter and I needed to give the issues my full consideration before responding to you.

Department for Employment and Learning

South Eastern Regional College

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how many staff within the communications department of the South Eastern Regional College were on stress-related sick leave in each of the last three years; (ii) how many working days were lost as a result; and (iii) what percentage of the total working days were lost.

(AQW 6094/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department does not keep records of college personnel. While I have a general responsibility for the performance of the college and its use of public funds the performance of individual staff members is a matter for the Director of the College and the Governing Body. I have asked the Director to write to the Member.

Essential Skills Programmes

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) his Department's long-term plans for sustaining essential skills provision; and (ii) the role of Further and Higher Education Colleges in delivering essential skills programmes.

(AQW 6150/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) The Programme for Government 2008 – 2011 detailed a key goal of increasing the number of adult learners achieving a qualification in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills by 90,000 by 2015 to support the attainment of a growing and innovative economy. My Department has ensured the Budget 2008-11 allocations have been utilised to ensure the continued provision of Essential Skills and there has been a yearly increase in funding from 2007/08 to date. The empirical evidence indicates that the programme has been successful in addressing many individuals' Essential Skills' needs. Subject to the amount of future resourcing available my Department remains committed to addressing the Essential Skills needs within Northern Ireland.
- (ii) The Further and Higher Education Colleges have important roles in supporting the delivery of Essential Skills programme. The Further Education sector has been the principal provider of Essential Skills courses and this role will continue. The Higher Education Sector has had an important role in ensuring the Essential Skills tutor education policy delivers a highly qualified workforce and this role will continue.

Regional Colleges of Further and Higher Education

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the level of absence due to sickness amongst teaching staff within each of the six Regional Colleges of Further and Higher Education in each month since their merger in August 2007.

(AQW 6152/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The six Further Education Colleges have confirmed the number of lecturers from each college absent due to sickness in each month since August 2007, as detailed in Annex A.

ANNEX A

2007

Month	BMC	NRC	NWRC	SERC	SRC	SWC
August 2007	23	8	9	7	6	3
September 2007	44	26	34	20	34	24
October 2007	70	52	47	35	55	42
November 2007	108	69	54	44	72	48
December 2007	78	47	44	47	43	36

2008

Month	BMC	NRC	NWRC	SERC	SRC	SWC
January 2008	97	61	74	32	64	43
February 2008	87	77	62	40	52	31
March 2008	68	51	32	31	23	27
April 2008	81	60	47	32	25	32

Month	BMC	NRC	NWRC	SERC	SRC	SWC
May 2008	44	32	26	13	28	20
June 2008	51	25	18	12	16	13
July 2008	13	9	13	3	8	8
August 2008	12	10	14	3	10	13
September 2008	46	26	36	10	33	22
October 2008	52	37	53	24	50	29
November 2008	84	51	67	29	63	34
December 2008	68	34	60	36	58	34

2009

Month	BMC	NRC	NWRC	SERC	SRC	SWC
January 2009	103	61	68	28	45	34
February 2009	70	47	47	18	38	25
March 2009	86	44	35	20	49	24
April 2009	55	30	34	18	32	12
May 2009	53	27	44	15	33	18
June 2009	44	15	24	15	20	16
July 2009	15	10	14	2	2	8
August 2009	18	7	15	9	3	5
September 2009	76	33	48	23	40	18
October 2009	91	64	57	46	60	30
November 2009	105	69	72	46	75	37
December 2009	70	52	55	29	62	19

2010

Month	BMC	NRC	NWRC	SERC	SRC	SWC
January 2010	93	71	61	40	63	32
February 2010	88	52	63	32	49	29
March 2010	72	60	46	25	Figures not yet available	23

Note: the above data relates specifically to the number of lecturers absent from each college in any given month.

Lecturers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the initiative to increase the contracted hours of associated lecturers within Further and Higher Education Colleges (i) how many lecturers applied to have their hours increased; (ii) how many were successful; (iii) to provide

a breakdown by college of those who were not successful; and (iv) whether any college offered, or considered offering, a lower number of increased hours than those requested by applicants.

(AQW 6154/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: All contractual matters relating to staff employed within Further Education Colleges are a matter for the College's Governing Body. I am advised that an Associate Lecturer who has been in post for at least two years may apply to have his/her contract varied up to a maximum of a pro-rata 0.75 contract, subject to demonstrating agreed criteria.

The information requested by the member is outlined in the tables below:

College Name	No. of associate lecturers applying for increased hours
Belfast Metropolitan College	32
Northern Regional College	15
North West Regional College	38
South Eastern Regional College	11
Southern Regional College	4
South West College	2

College Name	No. of associate lecturers who had hours increased
Belfast Metropolitan College	28
Northern Regional College	10
North West Regional College	9 (3 applications still pending)
South Eastern Regional College	11
Southern Regional College	4
South West College	Process ongoing

College Name	No. of associate lecturers who were not successful
Belfast Metropolitan College	4
Northern Regional College	5
North West Regional College	26
South Eastern Regional College	0
Southern Regional College	0
South West College	N/A

College Name	No. of associate lecturers who had their hours increased, but by a lower number than requested
Belfast Metropolitan College	0
Northern Regional College	2
North West Regional College	0
South Eastern Regional College	0

College Name	No. of associate lecturers who had their hours increased, but by a lower number than requested
Southern Regional College	0
South West College	N/A

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of trips abroad by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) destination; (ii) cost; (iii) reason for travel; and (iv) the benefit to Northern Ireland as a direct result of the trip.

(AQW 6076/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The attached table (Appendix 1) details the number of trips to each destination, the cost of the trips and the reason for travel for the period 1st April 2007 – 31st March 2010. There was exceptional unusual travel in 2007/08 to support the Northern Ireland showcase at the Smithsonian Event in Washington.

The benefits to Northern Ireland were to contribute to the marketing of Northern Ireland to a wide range of clients in a variety of activities, to see and learn from best practice on how to develop tourism products in Northern Ireland and to build relationships with US and European Business Tourism Buyers to encourage them to suggest Northern Ireland to their clients for future conferences and incentive trips.

APPENDIX 1

NITB TRIPS ABROAD (1ST APRIL 2007 – 31ST MARCH 2010)

Destination:	Trips	Cost: (£)	Reason:
2007/08:			
Frankfurt, Germany	1	1127	Attendance at IMEX Business Tourism Show
Washington, USA	7	18218	Representing NITB at Smithsonian Event in Washington
Berlin, Germany	2	873	Attendance at TIL European Conference
Toronto, Canada	1	1571	Attendance at Incentive Works Trade Show for Business Tourism
Chicago, USA	1	2265	Attendance at Motivation Trade Show Chicago for Business Tourism
Toronto, Canada & Los Angeles/New York, USA	1	4073	Attendance at Visit Europe Media Exchange, Toronto, Los Angeles & New York
Barcelona, Spain	1	875	Attendance at EIBTM Trade Show for Business Tourism
Total:	14	29002	

Destination:	Trips	Cost: (£)	Reason:
2008/09:			
Frankfurt, Germany	1	1008	Attendance at IMEX Business Tourism Show
Quebec, Canada	1	1479	Attendance at Incentive Works Trade Show for Business Tourism
Chicago, USA	1	1344	Attendance at Motivation Trade Show Chicago for Business Tourism
Barcelona, Spain	1	820	Attendance at EIBTM Trade Show for Business Tourism
Madrid, Spain	1	833	Quarterly Statutory Tourist Boards CE's Meeting
Total:	5	5484	
2009/10:			
Frankfurt, Germany	1	1226	Attendance at IMEX Business Tourism Show
Charlottesville, USA	1	2869	Course for CEO on Leadership for a Democratic Society at FEI
Gothenburg, Sweden	1	458	ECM Annual Event - Events & Meetings in the City
Toronto, Canada	1	1284	Attendance at Incentive Works Trade Show
Chicago, USA	1	1398	Attendance at Motivation Trade Show for Business Tourism.
Amsterdam, Netherlands	1	319	Attendance at Business Tourism Trade Show.
Malaga, Spain	1	45	NITB made a presentation at annual conference of International Golf Travel Market (IGTM).
Barcelona, Spain	1	166	Attendance at EIBTM Trade Show for Business Tourism
New York, USA	1	2705	St Patrick's Week with Minister in US
Santiago, Spain	2	2328	Learning journey to look at best practice in Santiago de Compostela, World Heritage City.
Total:	11	12798	
Grand Total	30	47284	

Legacy of the Titanic

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has in place to celebrate the legacy of the Titanic leading up to 2012/13.

(AQW 6077/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of Northern Ireland's five signature projects, identified in the Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007, is the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). DETI supported by NITB is fully engaged to deliver this project by 2012 to coincide with and commemorate the Titanic centenary and celebrate the legacy of Titanic.

One of the key elements of the Titanic Signature Project is a new Titanic inspired visitor attraction. The NI Executive has committed £36.95m towards the construction of the iconic Titanic Signature Building. This is being administered through the NITB and will be the focus of other associated developments in Titanic Quarter and beyond. The Signature building will house a world class visitor exhibition which will include state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history attracting up to 400,000 visitors annually.

NITB is also part funding some key heritage projects associated with the legacy of the Titanic, through its Tourism Development Scheme. These will be open to the public in the lead up to 2012 and beyond. These projects are important authentic assets and include the £1.2m restoration of Thompson Dock & Pump-House (completed 2008), restoration of Hamilton Dock and SS Nomadic (for completion 2011). MV Constance is also being restored and developed as a heritage visitor attraction (opening 2010) and will include a maritime theme.

NITB is leading and co-ordinating the development of a Titanic focused marketing and communications strategy with key partners, to ensure that the tourist potential of the centenary is captured. A budget of £100k has been allocated by NITB to carry out this marketing and communications activity for 2010-11. NITB is also working with other government departments and Belfast City Council to support and promote events to commemorate the centenary, which will encourage tourists to visit from all over the world. The draft events programme builds from May 2011, when Titanic was launched in Belfast.

DETI working closely with NITB to develop a proposal for an NI 2012 programme of events and activities, which is also likely to include Titanic themed celebrations and commemorations. DETI will be working with key partners including Belfast City Council to develop proposals.

Plans are also well underway with Belfast City Council and the Department of Social Development to carry out an assessment of, and establish a vision for, Titanic and maritime Belfast. This will assess how current, planned and future developments (tourism, public realm, transport, infrastructure and commercial) impact on the waterfront and how they connect to the wider city, to the strength of Belfast's maritime heritage offer and assets, and deliver best practice as can be seen in other maritime destinations. The objective is to realise the full tourism and regeneration potential of Belfast and Greater Belfast's Titanic and maritime heritage.

Belfast City Council has agreed a Titanic Cities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Southampton, Liverpool, Cherbourg and Cobh. NITB is actively supporting this MOU which encourages cities which have a Titanic legacy to reap the benefits of partnership to create a fitting commemorative programme for the centenary as well as gain economies of scale in marketing and promotion.

Funds to deliver the outlined activity from 2011 onwards will be subject to the outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Legacy of the Titanic

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has in place to celebrate the legacy of the Titanic leading up to 2012/13.

(AQW 6078/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of Northern Ireland's five signature projects, identified in the Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007, is the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). DETI supported by NITB is fully engaged to deliver this project by 2012 to coincide with and commemorate the Titanic centenary and celebrate the legacy of Titanic.

One of the key elements of the Titanic Signature Project is a new Titanic inspired visitor attraction. The NI Executive has committed £36.95m towards the construction of the iconic Titanic Signature Building. This is being administered through the NITB and will be the focus of other associated developments in Titanic Quarter and beyond. The Signature building will house a world class visitor exhibition which will include state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history attracting up to 400,000 visitors annually.

NITB is also part funding some key heritage projects associated with the legacy of the Titanic, through its Tourism Development Scheme. These will be open to the public in the lead up to 2012 and beyond. These projects are important authentic assets and include the £1.2m restoration of Thompson Dock & Pump-House (completed 2008), restoration of Hamilton Dock and SS Nomadic (for completion 2011). MV Confiance is also being restored and developed as a heritage visitor attraction (opening 2010) and will include a maritime theme.

NITB is leading and co-ordinating the development of a Titanic focused marketing and communications strategy with key partners, to ensure that the tourist potential of the centenary is captured. A budget of £100k has been allocated by NITB to carry out this marketing and communications activity for 2010-11. NITB is also working with other government departments and Belfast City Council to support and promote events to commemorate the centenary, which will encourage tourists to visit from all over the world. The draft events programme builds from May 2011, when Titanic was launched in Belfast.

DETI working closely with NITB to develop a proposal for an NI 2012 programme of events and activities, which is also likely to include Titanic themed celebrations and commemorations. DETI will be working with key partners including Belfast City Council to develop proposals.

Plans are also well underway with Belfast City Council and the Department of Social Development to carry out an assessment of, and establish a vision for, Titanic and maritime Belfast. This will assess how current, planned and future developments (tourism, public realm, transport, infrastructure and commercial) impact on the waterfront and how they connect to the wider city, to the strength of Belfast's maritime heritage offer and assets, and deliver best practice as can be seen in other maritime destinations. The objective is to realise the full tourism and regeneration potential of Belfast and Greater Belfast's Titanic and maritime heritage.

Belfast City Council has agreed a Titanic Cities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Southampton, Liverpool, Cherbourg and Cobh. NITB is actively supporting this MOU which encourages cities which have a Titanic legacy to reap the benefits of partnership to create a fitting commemorative programme for the centenary as well as gain economies of scale in marketing and promotion.

Funds to deliver the outlined activity from 2011 onwards will be subject to the outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Legacy of the Titanic

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money has been set aside to assist the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to (i) plan; and (ii) promote the legacy of the Titanic leading up to 2012/13.

(AQW 6080/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of Northern Ireland's five signature projects, identified in the Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007, is the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). DETI supported by NITB is fully engaged to deliver this project by 2012 to coincide with and commemorate the Titanic centenary and celebrate the legacy of Titanic.

One of the key elements of the Titanic Signature Project is a new Titanic inspired visitor attraction. The NI Executive has committed £36.95m towards the construction of the iconic Titanic Signature Building. This is being administered through the NITB and will be the focus of other associated developments in Titanic Quarter and beyond. The Signature building will house a world class visitor exhibition which will include state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history attracting up to 400,000 visitors annually.

NITB is also part funding some key heritage projects associated with the legacy of the Titanic, through its Tourism Development Scheme. These will be open to the public in the lead up to 2012 and beyond. These projects are important authentic assets and include the £1.2m restoration of Thompson Dock & Pump-House (completed 2008), restoration of Hamilton Dock and SS Nomadic (for completion 2011). MV Confiance is also being restored and developed as a heritage visitor attraction (opening 2010) and will include a maritime theme.

NITB is leading and co-ordinating the development of a Titanic focused marketing and communications strategy with key partners, to ensure that the tourist potential of the centenary is captured. A budget of £100k has been allocated by NITB to carry out this marketing and communications activity for 2010-11. NITB is also working with other government departments and Belfast City Council to support and promote events to commemorate the centenary, which will encourage tourists to visit from all over the world. The draft events programme builds from May 2011, when Titanic was launched in Belfast.

DETI working closely with NITB to develop a proposal for an NI 2012 programme of events and activities, which is also likely to include Titanic themed celebrations and commemorations. DETI will be working with key partners including Belfast City Council to develop proposals.

Plans are also well underway with Belfast City Council and the Department of Social Development to carry out an assessment of, and establish a vision for, Titanic and maritime Belfast. This will assess how current, planned and future developments (tourism, public realm, transport, infrastructure and commercial) impact on the waterfront and how they connect to the wider city, to the strength of Belfast's maritime heritage offer and assets, and deliver best practice as can be seen in other maritime destinations. The objective is to realise the full tourism and regeneration potential of Belfast and Greater Belfast's Titanic and maritime heritage.

Belfast City Council has agreed a Titanic Cities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Southampton, Liverpool, Cherbourg and Cobh. NITB is actively supporting this MOU which encourages cities which have a Titanic legacy to reap the benefits of partnership to create a fitting commemorative programme for the centenary as well as gain economies of scale in marketing and promotion.

Funds to deliver the outlined activity from 2011 onwards will be subject to the outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Legacy of the Titanic

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money her Department has set aside to (i) plan; and (ii) promote the legacy of the Titanic in the lead up to 2012/13.
(AQW 6140/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of Northern Ireland's five signature projects, identified in the Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007, is the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). DETI supported by NITB is fully engaged to deliver this project by 2012 to coincide with and commemorate the Titanic centenary and celebrate the legacy of Titanic.

One of the key elements of the Titanic Signature Project is a new Titanic inspired visitor attraction. The NI Executive has committed £36.95m towards the construction of the iconic Titanic Signature Building. This is being administered through the NITB and will be the focus of other associated developments in Titanic Quarter and beyond. The Signature building will house a world class visitor exhibition which will include state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history attracting up to 400,000 visitors annually.

NITB is also part funding some key heritage projects associated with the legacy of the Titanic, through its Tourism Development Scheme. These will be open to the public in the lead up to 2012 and beyond. These projects are important authentic assets and include the £1.2m restoration of Thompson Dock & Pump-House (completed 2008), restoration of Hamilton Dock and SS Nomadic (for completion 2011). MV Confiance is also being restored and developed as a heritage visitor attraction (opening 2010) and will include a maritime theme.

NITB is leading and co-ordinating the development of a Titanic focused marketing and communications strategy with key partners, to ensure that the tourist potential of the centenary is captured. A budget of £100k has been allocated by NITB to carry out this marketing and communications activity for 2010-11. NITB is also working with other government departments and Belfast City Council to support and promote events to commemorate the centenary, which will encourage tourists to visit from all over the world. The draft events programme builds from May 2011, when Titanic was launched in Belfast.

DETI is working closely with NITB to develop a proposal for an NI 2012 programme of events and activities, which is also likely to include Titanic themed celebrations and commemorations. DETI will be working with key partners including Belfast City Council to develop proposals.

Plans are also well underway with Belfast City Council and the Department of Social Development to carry out an assessment of, and establish a vision for, Titanic and maritime Belfast. This will assess how current, planned and future developments (tourism, public realm, transport, infrastructure and commercial) impact on the waterfront and how they connect to the wider city, to the strength of Belfast's maritime heritage offer and assets, and deliver best practice as can be seen in other maritime destinations. The objective is to realise the full tourism and regeneration potential of Belfast and Greater Belfast's Titanic and maritime heritage.

Belfast City Council has agreed a Titanic Cities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Southampton, Liverpool, Cherbourg and Cobh. NITB is actively supporting this MOU which encourages cities which have a Titanic legacy to reap the benefits of partnership to create a fitting commemorative programme for the centenary as well as gain economies of scale in marketing and promotion.

Funds to deliver the outlined activity from 2011 onwards will be subject to the outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Legacy of the Titanic

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has presented any proposals to the Executive in relation to celebrating the legacy of the Titanic in the lead up to 2012/13. **(AQW 6142/10)**

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of Northern Ireland's five signature projects, identified in the Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007, is the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). DETI supported by NITB is fully engaged to deliver this project by 2012 to coincide with and commemorate the Titanic centenary and celebrate the legacy of Titanic.

One of the key elements of the Titanic Signature Project is a new Titanic inspired visitor attraction. The NI Executive has committed £36.95m towards the construction of the iconic Titanic Signature Building. This is being administered through the NITB and will be the focus of other associated developments in Titanic Quarter and beyond. The Signature building will house a world class visitor exhibition which will include state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history attracting up to 400,000 visitors annually.

NITB is also part funding some key heritage projects associated with the legacy of the Titanic, through its Tourism Development Scheme. These will be open to the public in the lead up to 2012 and beyond. These projects are important authentic assets and include the £1.2m restoration of Thompson Dock & Pump-House (completed 2008), restoration of Hamilton Dock and SS Nomadic (for completion 2011). MV Constance is also being restored and developed as a heritage visitor attraction (opening 2010) and will include a maritime theme.

NITB is leading and co-ordinating the development of a Titanic focused marketing and communications strategy with key partners, to ensure that the tourist potential of the centenary is captured. A budget of £100k has been allocated by NITB to carry out this marketing and communications activity for 2010-11. NITB is also working with other government departments and Belfast City Council to support and promote events to commemorate the centenary, which will encourage tourists to visit from all over the world. The draft events programme builds from May 2011, when Titanic was launched in Belfast.

DETI working closely with NITB to develop a proposal for an NI 2012 programme of events and activities, which is also likely to include Titanic themed celebrations and commemorations. DETI will be working with key partners including Belfast City Council to develop proposals.

Plans are also well underway with Belfast City Council and the Department of Social Development to carry out an assessment of, and establish a vision for, Titanic and maritime Belfast. This will assess how current, planned and future developments (tourism, public realm, transport, infrastructure and

commercial) impact on the waterfront and how they connect to the wider city, to the strength of Belfast's maritime heritage offer and assets, and deliver best practice as can be seen in other maritime destinations. The objective is to realise the full tourism and regeneration potential of Belfast and Greater Belfast's Titanic and maritime heritage.

Belfast City Council has agreed a Titanic Cities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Southampton, Liverpool, Cherbourg and Cobh. NITB is actively supporting this MOU which encourages cities which have a Titanic legacy to reap the benefits of partnership to create a fitting commemorative programme for the centenary as well as gain economies of scale in marketing and promotion.

Funds to deliver the outlined activity from 2011 onwards will be subject to the outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Legacy of the Titanic

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any representation has been made to Belfast City Council in relation to planning and promoting the legacy of the Titanic in the lead up to 2012/13.

(AQW 6144/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of Northern Ireland's five signature projects, identified in the Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007, is the Titanic Signature Project (TSP). DETI supported by NITB is fully engaged to deliver this project by 2012 to coincide with and commemorate the Titanic centenary and celebrate the legacy of Titanic.

One of the key elements of the Titanic Signature Project is a new Titanic inspired visitor attraction. The NI Executive has committed £36.95m towards the construction of the iconic Titanic Signature Building. This is being administered through the NITB and will be the focus of other associated developments in Titanic Quarter and beyond. The Signature building will house a world class visitor exhibition which will include state-of-the-art displays on the story of the Titanic and Belfast's industrial, shipbuilding and maritime history attracting up to 400,000 visitors annually.

NITB is also part funding some key heritage projects associated with the legacy of the Titanic, through its Tourism Development Scheme. These will be open to the public in the lead up to 2012 and beyond. These projects are important authentic assets and include the £1.2m restoration of Thompson Dock & Pump-House (completed 2008), restoration of Hamilton Dock and SS Nomadic (for completion 2011). MV Confiance is also being restored and developed as a heritage visitor attraction (opening 2010) and will include a maritime theme.

NITB is leading and co-ordinating the development of a Titanic focused marketing and communications strategy with key partners, to ensure that the tourist potential of the centenary is captured. A budget of £100k has been allocated by NITB to carry out this marketing and communications activity for 2010-11. NITB is also working with other government departments and Belfast City Council to support and promote events to commemorate the centenary, which will encourage tourists to visit from all over the world. The draft events programme builds from May 2011, when Titanic was launched in Belfast.

DETI working closely with NITB to develop a proposal for an NI 2012 programme of events and activities, which is also likely to include Titanic themed celebrations and commemorations. DETI will be working with key partners including Belfast City Council to develop proposals.

Plans are also well underway with Belfast City Council and the Department of Social Development to carry out an assessment of, and establish a vision for, Titanic and maritime Belfast. This will assess how current, planned and future developments (tourism, public realm, transport, infrastructure and commercial) impact on the waterfront and how they connect to the wider city, to the strength of Belfast's maritime heritage offer and assets, and deliver best practice as can be seen in other maritime destinations. The objective is to realise the full tourism and regeneration potential of Belfast and Greater Belfast's Titanic and maritime heritage.

Belfast City Council has agreed a Titanic Cities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Southampton, Liverpool, Cherbourg and Cobh. NITB is actively supporting this MOU which encourages cities which have a Titanic legacy to reap the benefits of partnership to create a fitting commemorative programme for the centenary as well as gain economies of scale in marketing and promotion.

Funds to deliver the outlined activity from 2011 onwards will be subject to the outcome of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Funding Debt Services

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department will be assuming responsibility for funding debt services, as is the case in the English and Welsh jurisdictions. (AQW 6233/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department has had no discussions with OFMDFM or officials in the new Department of Justice on this matter.

Funding for both face to face and telephone debt advice in Northern Ireland is currently the responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

My Department has funded free face to face debt advice services since 2005. It continues to fund both face to face and more recently telephone debt advice services with an annual budget of £1m.

My Department has recently commissioned KPMG to conduct research and report on current and future debt advice provision in Northern Ireland. I expect to receive the final report during the summer of 2010.

Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 was 'screened out' from the Equality Impact Assessment process. (AQW 6240/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 was equality screened in line with DETI's statutory obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The screening found that the draft Tourism Strategy is unlikely to have a significant differential impact on any of the Section 75 groups. It is a high level, over-arching strategy from which policies/actions will be developed for the long-term benefit of everyone in Northern Ireland. The plans and actions to be implemented under the umbrella of the new Tourism Strategy will be delivered by a wide range of stakeholders in both the public and private sectors. These activities will be assessed in their own right against their impact on the Section 75 Groups by the organisations responsible, and further screening and impact assessments carried out as appropriate.

The completed screening template for the draft Tourism Strategy is available from DETI upon request and any comments on the draft Tourism Strategy may be forwarded to the Department as part of the current consultation exercise on the Strategy which ends on 20 May 2010.

Migrant Workers

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current number of migrant workers. (AQW 6326/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There is no definitive source of migrant worker information in the UK. The closest approximation is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relates to the number of people currently employed in Northern Ireland who were born overseas.

In October-December 2009, the LFS estimated there were 767,000 people in employment in Northern Ireland. Of these, an estimated 43,000 (5.7%)¹ were born outside the United Kingdom or Republic of Ireland.

- 1 Please note that these estimates are sourced to a sample survey and are subject to sampling error. Also, the LFS may undercount the numbers of persons who were born overseas, as people living in certain types of communal establishment (such as hostels, hotels or boarding houses) are not covered by the LFS sample.

NVQ Level 2

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the percentage of people of working age in the Foyle Constituency with NVQ Level 2 or lower as their highest qualification; and how this percentage compares to Northern Ireland as a whole.

(AQO 1168/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Figures from the 2008 annual Labour Force Survey (LFS) database estimated that 61.9%¹ of people of working age in the Foyle Constituency had NVQ Level 2 or lower as their highest qualification. This compared to a figure of 55.0% for Northern Ireland as a whole.

- 1 The LFS is a sample survey and estimates sourced to it are subject to sampling error.

Department of the Environment

Local Government Chief Executives

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the salaries for each of the 26 Local Government Chief Executives.

(AQW 6059/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The table below details the salary band range for all 26 District Council Chief Executives for the financial year 2008/2009, the last year for which certified figures are available.

Salary Band Range	Number	Council
120k-130k	1	Belfast
110-120k	1	Newry & Mourne
90-100k	6	Castlereagh Derry Down Lisburn Newtownabbey North Down
80-90k	11	Antrim Ards Armagh Ballymoney Carrickfergus Cookstown Craigavon Fermanagh Magherafelt Omagh Strabane

Salary Band Range	Number	Council
70-80k	7	Ballymena Banbridge Coleraine Dungannon & S Tyrone Larne Limavady Moyle
Total	26	

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to transferring responsibility for administering domestic discharge consents from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to local councils.

(AQW 6114/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department has not given formal consideration to the transfer of responsibility for administering domestic consents to local Councils.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) currently administers the process for issuing domestic consents under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. There are a number of reasons why this work could not readily be transferred out of the Department to Local Councils at this time.

It is a legal requirement that any discharge of trade or sewage effluent to a waterway or water contained in any underground strata has consent under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Article 7A (3) (a) of the Order specifically states that this consent must be issued by the Department (defined in Article 3 (1) of the Order as the Department of the Environment). Therefore legally it is not possible to transfer the responsibility for consent issue outside of the Department.

The purpose of a Water Order consent to discharge is to protect water quality in the receiving aquatic environment and to ensure achievement of environmental objectives set under the Water Framework Directive. The Department, through NIEA, is the competent authority charged with responsibility for implementing the Directive and is, therefore, best placed to issue consents to discharge with conditions formulated to ensure that these environmental requirements are met.

General Grant given to Local Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the level of general grant given to each of the 26 local councils in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6153/10)

Minister of the Environment: General grant is made up of two elements, de-rating and resources. The level of general grant given to each of the 26 local councils in each of the last five years is set out in the tables below.

District Council	General Grant De-rating				
	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £	2008/2009 £	2009/2010 £	2010/2011 (Estimated) £
Antrim	847,245	877,284	946,715	1,034,215	1,034,215
Ards	572,907	566,376	574,070	596,841	596,841
Armagh	588,511	598,757	646,024	690,292	690,292

District Council	General Grant De-rating				
	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £	2008/2009 £	2009/2010 £	2010/2011 (Estimated) £
Ballymena	1,085,387	1,144,706	1,167,055	1,212,474	1,212,474
Ballymoney	312,904	293,965	297,655	281,000	281,000
Banbridge	448,773	406,633	424,313	448,244	448,244
Belfast	4,753,074	4,040,967	4,246,910	4,372,476	4,372,476
Carrickfergus	488,074	438,050	500,902	537,334	537,334
Castlereagh	650,121	647,128	673,449	684,084	684,084
Coleraine	526,856	538,037	587,356	596,213	596,213
Cookstown	655,241	672,615	785,744	817,510	817,510
Craigavon	2,031,039	2,030,455	2,056,081	2,144,907	2,144,907
Derry	1,376,474	1,399,641	1,372,924	1,407,484	1,407,484
Down	443,756	409,343	447,133	487,918	487,918
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1,329,961	1,373,529	1,502,211	1,583,210	1,583,210
Fermanagh	732,291	719,087	783,175	861,691	861,691
Larne	465,528	467,719	476,748	441,082	441,082
Limavady	188,949	205,929	223,151	165,002	165,002
Lisburn	1,598,621	1,543,160	1,582,548	1,708,872	1,708,872
Magherafelt	597,663	616,994	637,506	694,746	694,746
Moyle	152,274	159,508	171,715	179,585	179,585
Newry & Mourne	1,008,815	997,357	1,086,576	1,164,675	1,164,675
Newtownabbey	1,313,528	1,260,091	1,383,804	1,374,603	1,374,603
North Down	477,481	473,982	515,771	560,168	560,168
Omagh	483,400	503,320	532,223	540,751	540,751
Strabane	321,959	311,430	260,619	287,322	287,322

District Council	General Grant Resources				
	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £	2008/2009 £	2009/2010 £	2010/2011 £
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0
Ards	1,381,172	1,435,528	1,193,565	886,455	835,126
Armagh	1,455,962	1,616,643	1,617,037	1,615,563	1,567,840
Ballymena	0	0	1,939	0	0
Ballymoney	915,511	1,069,768	1,118,710	1,087,188	1,032,567

District Council	General Grant Resources				
	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £	2008/2009 £	2009/2010 £	2010/2011 £
Banbridge	1,005,136	1,231,275	1,104,630	1,072,464	1,037,637
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	369,564	511,880	608,586	653,040	581,566
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	890,226	987,971	851,627	665,130	618,262
Craigavon	0	903,470	645,762	970,527	968,275
Derry	1,188,657	1,402,830	1,299,086	1,371,381	1,370,642
Down	1,709,521	1,847,118	1,757,243	1,528,437	1,445,679
Dungannon & South Tyrone	909,843	1,096,781	972,805	948,033	951,896
Fermanagh	1,417,182	1,604,221	1,480,862	1,258,804	1,125,316
Larne	0	201,431	237,244	212,217	111,789
Limavady	1,266,695	1,493,009	1,444,168	1,341,942	1,318,671
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt	1,380,881	1,391,643	1,213,322	1,174,811	1,109,458
Moyle	550,314	624,107	602,314	581,278	510,448
Newry & Mourne	1,771,737	2,079,148	1,983,190	1,664,227	1,660,626
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	1,336,901	1,534,039	1,445,936	1,452,552	1,377,870
Strabane	1,947,698	2,121,019	2,001,032	2,012,951	1,873,332

Private Research Papers

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to make publicly available private research papers on (i) industrial architecture; (ii) historic buildings; (iii) industrial archaeology; and (iv) built heritage.

(AQW 6188/10)

Minister of the Environment: As part of its work to record the historic built environment the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA): Built Heritage Directorate has accumulated a substantial archive of information about the historic environment, including archaeological sites, historic monuments, historic buildings, maritime and industrial heritage sites, historic park, gardens and demesnes, battlefields and 20th century defence heritage structures. This information is stored in, and made available to the public through, the Northern Ireland Monuments and Buildings Record (the MBR). The archive material includes databases, reports, research papers, surveys, maps, photographic, drawn and digital material and a library collection.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is committed to making the information it holds about the historic environment available to the public in a form that is convenient and easy to use. Most of the material held in the MBR can be accessed in person by visiting the Pat Collins Reading Room in the MBR, where a member of staff will assist with any research queries. Information can also be requested by writing to, telephoning or emailing the MBR.

Much of the material is also available online through the Built Heritage section of the NIEA website, with work ongoing to add additional databases, in particular the Industrial Heritage database, to the existing online material. Further details of each of these archives can also be accessed through the Monuments and Buildings Record page on the NIEA website at: <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/built-home/recording.htm>.

Private Research Papers

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much money the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has spent in the last three years on purchasing private research papers for public access.
(AQW 6189/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has not purchased private research papers in the last three years. Although we made a substantial offer for the 'private' part of the McCutcheon archive on Industrial Archaeology, etc, our offer was not accepted. However, there have been several donations of such material by members of the public, free of charge, to the Monuments and Buildings Record within that time. Occasionally the Agency makes a financial contribution to relevant publications, which may include research papers.

Industrial Archaeology and Built Heritage

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the archives held by his Department on (i) industrial archaeology; and (ii) built heritage.
(AQW 6190/10)

Minister of the Environment: All of the archives referred to below form part of the Northern Ireland Monuments and Buildings Record.

Information about Industrial Heritage and Industrial Archaeology is normally contained within the Industrial Heritage Record (IHR). The IHR contains details on over 16,000 industrial sites. The major part of the record consists of the extensive McCutcheon Collection, which is held on loan from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. The collection consists of over 27,000 black and white photographs and a colour slide collection taken by Dr W A McCutcheon during his comprehensive industrial heritage survey of Northern Ireland, commissioned by the then Ancient Monuments Advisory Council (which was superseded in 1971 by the Historic Monuments Council), as well as associated notes and papers.

Information about other forms of Built Heritage is contained within several discrete archives within the MBR.

Information about sites of archaeological interest, other than industrial heritage, is normally contained within the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). The SMR holds information on over 16,000 archaeological sites and historic monuments, such as standing stones or ruined churches. Detailed field descriptions of each monument are available as well as associated historic reference material.

Information about historic buildings and other structures of architectural or historic interest is normally contained in the Historic Buildings Record (HBR). The HBR archive holds information on over 8,500 historic buildings, based on the so called 'First Survey' carried out between 1969 and 1993. A 'Second Survey' of historic buildings is currently underway and extensive, detailed, new information is being added to the existing historic buildings record. Much of the information in this archive relates to Listed Buildings.

The Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Archive contains a comprehensive record for over 700 historic parks, gardens and demesnes. Work on this archive was initiated by the NI Heritage Gardens

committee with information gathered through site inspection, map and documentary research. Work on this archive is continuing, with the development of a Register and Supplementary list of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest for Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Maritime Record is currently being developed in partnership with the Centre for Maritime Archaeology at the University of Ulster. Surveys have already been undertaken on Strangford Lough and Rathlin Island, with ongoing surveys of the remainder of Northern Ireland's coastline and territorial waters. The results of these surveys are added to the record.

The Defence Heritage Record holds details about over 500 sites of twentieth-century defence heritage interest, recorded by volunteers, as part of the Defence Heritage Project. This record contributes to the wider Defence of Britain Project, run by the Council for British Archaeology. Recorded sites are predominantly associated with military features from the First and Second World Wars, as well as some Cold War installations, and include trenches, gun and searchlight emplacements, pill boxes, observation posts, airfields, harbours, naval and flying boat bases and air raid shelters.

The Architectural Drawings Archive includes collections from several notable architects who designed or worked on some of Northern Ireland's most important historic buildings. The archive contains c.15,000 McGeagh drawings, c.2,200 McKinstry drawings, several hundred Bell drawings and the Clokey stained glass collection. Also included is the Ministry of Finance collection, consisting of material from the original Board of Works files of the Ministry of Finance (NI) dating from 1923 to 1952.

The Photographic Archive consists of over 50,000 black and white photographs, 100,000 colour slides and an increasing number of digital images detailing historic sites, monuments and buildings. The archive also holds a number of collections, such as material deposited by the architectural historian Sir Charles Brett; the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society; G P Bell; the University of Cambridge aerial photograph collection, and; the Seeds architectural collection.

If you require further information on archives relating to the built heritage of Northern Ireland, staff at the NIEA: Built Heritage Monuments and Buildings Record will be happy to assist.

Illegal Dumping

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been subject to enforcement action by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency for illegal dumping in (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6239/10)

Minister of the Environment: The table below sets out the number of successful prosecution cases for illegal dumping in each of the following District Council areas since 2005, making a total of 4 prosecutions in Larne, 2 in Carrickfergus and 3 in Newtownabbey. The figures in brackets indicate the number of warning letters issued, for those years where records are available.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Larne	1	1	0	1 (0)	1 (1)
Carrickfergus	1	0	0	1 (0)	0 (4)
Newtownabbey	1	0	1	1 (6)	0 (6)

Proposed Hotel at Magherafelt Road, Castledawson

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment why there is a delay in issuing planning approval for a proposed hotel at Magherafelt Road, Castledawson, Ref H/2008/0089, given that the application received corporate council approval in June 2009.

(AQW 6242/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have recently met Dr McCrea representing objectors to this planning application. I am currently considering further briefing prepared by my officials on the issues involved. The proposal represents a significant economic investment and I am aware of the interest of the applicant in having this matter resolved. In this respect I would hope to conclude my consideration as soon as possible.

Planning Application E/2008/0346/F

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on retrospective planning application E/2008/0346/F at Portbradden Road, Portbradden.

(AQW 6266/10)

Minister of the Environment: Planning Service wrote to the agent on 11 February 2010 to seek amended drawings to address the issues raised by the Roads Service consultation response which was received on 9 February 2010.

The agent has sought an extension of time to allow the submission of the outstanding information. The application is being held pending a response from the applicant's agent.

Driving Licences

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many driving licences posted (i) to ; and (ii) from the Driver and Vehicle Agency have been 'lost in the post' in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6270/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency does not keep records of the numbers of licences lost en route to the Agency.

The following table indicates the numbers of licences issued free of charge where previously issued licences were declared lost in the post within a period of six weeks from the dates of issue of the original licences.

FINANCIAL YEAR

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
2592	3109	1150	498	295

Where a licence is declared lost outside the six week period, or lost, destroyed or damaged in other circumstances, the customer is obliged to apply for a duplicate licence and pay the appropriate fee. Agency records do not distinguish the nature of duplicate licences. The following table indicates the number of duplicate licences issued on application:

FINANCIAL YEAR

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
13018	15160	19550	20810	14807

Driving Licences

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many driving licences have been recorded as 'lost' by the Driver and Vehicle Agency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6271/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) issues duplicate licences to replace licences which have been declared lost, stolen or destroyed. DVA records do not distinguish between the reasons for duplicate licences except where a licence is declared "lost in post". In these

circumstances, the Agency will issue a replacement licence free of charge, provided the loss is reported within six weeks of the date of issue of the original licence.

The following table indicates the number of licences issued as replacements for licences declared lost, stolen or destroyed, or for licences which were declared lost in post.

Category	Financial Year				
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Lost In Post	2592	3109	1150	498	295
Lost, Stolen or Destroyed	13018	15160	19550	20810	14807

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment whether he can confirm that the current planning issues in relation to the George Best Belfast City Airport will not affect the prioritisation of public inquiries for retail developments at (i) Sprucefield ; and (ii) Newtownards.

(AQW 6280/10)

Minister of the Environment: As the GBBCA is technical in nature, it would be a different type of hearing than Sprucefield and Newtownards appeals that deal with retailing. Newtownards is the next hearing of its type after Sprucefield. At the same time, Planning Service confirmed that the Department wished to withdraw application X/2005/1156 (Castlebawn/Tesco, Newtownards) from consideration at public inquiry. The PAC was also asked to proceed to arrange a co-joined public inquiry for the other two Newtownards retail applications, the extension to Ards Shopping Centre and the Castlebawn proposal.

Proposed Public Inquiry on Retail Developments in Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Planning Service and Tesco have exchanged written correspondence in relation to Tesco's involvement in the proposed public inquiry on retail developments in Newtownards; and to outline the outcome of this correspondence.

(AQW 6281/10)

Minister of the Environment: My officials have written to Tesco's agent stating that Planning Service will ask the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to proceed with the public inquiry without the inclusion of application X/2005/1156 which proposes a Tesco store and six individual retail units, comprising a total of 14,933sqm of retail floorspace. Since the submission of this application, I have agreed in principle to approve a Tesco store on same site. The PAC has now been asked to proceed to arrange a co-joined public inquiry for X/2004/1800, an extension to Ards Shopping Centre, and X2005/0653, the Castlebawn retail proposal.

Hanwood Trust Filling Station

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment why the planning application for the Hanwood Trust Filling Station, Y/2009/0440/F, was approved despite the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team's opinion that the application could be refused on prematurity grounds.

(AQW 6313/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service formed the opinion to grant planning permission for this proposal because at the time this application was submitted development had already commenced on foot of an extant planning permission which incorporated this site. In circumstances where the principle of development was firmly established, the issue of prematurity does not arise and no purpose would be served in consulting the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team. Consequently it is not correct that the BMAP team's opinion was that the application could be refused on prematurity grounds.

Hanwood Trust Filling Station

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment how the planning application for the Hanwood Trust Filling Station, Y/2009/0440/F, was recommended for approval without being referred to the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team.

(AQW 6316/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service formed the opinion to grant planning permission for this proposal because at the time this application was submitted development had already commenced on foot of an extant planning permission which incorporated this site. In circumstances where the principle of development was firmly established, the issue of prematurity does not arise and there was no purpose to be served in consulting the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team.

PPS5 Policy Statement

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to outline (i) the current status of the draft PPS5 policy statement; (ii) when the judicial review is likely to be completed, and (iii) pending the outcome of the review, what policy is in place for the protection of traditional town centres.

(AQW 6360/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is still awaiting the outcome of the Judicial Review of draft PPS 5 – Retailing, Town Centres and Commercial Leisure Development which was heard in the High Court in January 2009. My Department currently has no indication of when this is likely to be expected. The current statutory planning policy for town centres is PPS 5 – Retailing and Town Centres which expresses the Department's commitment to protecting the vitality and viability of existing town centres.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Northern Ireland Prison Service and Northern Ireland Court Service

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) for a breakdown of staff by community background in (a) the Northern Ireland Prison Service; (b) the Northern Ireland Court Service; and (c) the Department of Justice; (ii) for his assessment of whether different communities are proportionately represented in each; and (iii) what steps he intends to take to address any under-representation which may exist.

(AQW 6104/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service are now part of the Department of Justice and as such their staff are members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. For the purposes of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 the Northern Ireland Civil Service is treated as a single employer and responsibility for monitoring falls to my Department.

Community background information is collected for the purpose of providing statutory returns to the Equality Commission and to enable the Service to monitor the effectiveness of its equal opportunities policies. The information is not processed in a way that identifies the community background profile of parts of Departments. To provide the information in the format required would require my Department to further process the data in a way that is not compatible with the reasons for which it is collected and consequently it cannot be provided.

As required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, my Department will continue to carry out regular reviews of the extent of fair participation across the NI Civil Service and will take appropriate action where a lack of fair participation is found.

Domestic Rate Payers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many domestic rate payers have been denied an early payment discount because they have paid their rates bill in full either one, two, or three days after the payment deadline has passed, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6124/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total number of ratepayers who were not automatically awarded an early payment discount during the rating year 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 because they had paid their rates bill in full either one, two or three days after the payment deadline had passed is as follows:

2008-2009	2009-2010
9,290	4,854

Land & Property Services does not hold this information prior to 2008.

Small Business Rates Relief Scheme

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses have benefited from the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme in each constituency to date.

(AQW 6218/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Tables showing the number of businesses awarded relief and the monetary value, by district council and ward have been placed in the Library. This information is not available by constituency.

Non Domestic Rates

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) how non domestic rates are calculated; and (ii) how much revenue is generated annually by (a) non-domestic rates in out of town properties; and (b) non-domestic rates in city/town centres in each constituency.

(AQW 6219/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The non domestic rate consists of a non domestic district rate and non domestic regional rate. The non domestic regional rate is agreed annually by the Executive. Each council sets its own individual non domestic district rate each year, based on the expenditure needs of the council for that particular year.

Approximately £522 million of revenue is generated annually through non domestic rating, which is broadly equivalent to 52% of the total revenue collected annually, however, Land & Property Services does not hold or record information regarding the amount of revenue generated annually by (a) non-domestic rates in out of town properties; and (b) non-domestic rates in city/town centres in each constituency.

Surplus Property Assets

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how his Department enables local authorities to link with the central asset clearing house (i) to bid for surplus public property for which other Departments or Agencies do not have a continuing need; and (ii) to establish if other public bodies have a requirement for properties that are surplus to current local authority requirements.[R]

(AQW 6275/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The policy and procedures relating to the sale or transfer of surplus property assets within the public sector are set out in guidelines published by the Central Advisory Unit within my Department's Land & Property Services Agency. The guidance is available on the website, www.lpsni.gov.uk.

It is obligatory for NI Government Departments and their Executive Agencies, Non Departmental Public Bodies and Education & Library Boards to comply with this disposal policy. Other public sector bodies including Local Authorities are encouraged to treat the guidance as best practice and to adopt it voluntarily.

Under the “clearing house procedure”, details of surplus property notified to Land & Property Services are trawled throughout the public sector including Local Authorities. A Local Authority may express interest in having the property or part of it transferred to it. Providing the Local Authority has a qualifying need and no other interest has been expressed in the property, this transfer will be arranged at a value assessed by the District Valuer.

Local Authorities may also notify Land & Property Services of their surplus property and have it trawled to other public sector users. As this is voluntary, it is rarely used except where the property would have very limited demand if sold on the open market.

Ratepayers

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when it will be possible for ratepayers to make payments by debit or credit card for amounts which exceed £1,000, without having to make two or more transactions.

(AQW 6362/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services does not impose restrictions on the amount that can be paid in a single transaction.

Debit card payments for rate bills are currently available through an online payment channel, in post offices and in some payzone outlets. Credit card payments for rate bills are available through an online payment channel. No limits are imposed on the online payment service, which is provided by Santander to LPS.

However, an individual's credit card company or bank may impose maximum transaction amounts based on factors such as their credit limit and available funds. In addition, payment providers impose the following restrictions to a single transaction:

- Post Office: maximum £999.99
- Payzone: maximum £300

These limits are imposed by the Post Office and Payzone to prevent money laundering.

Projected Birth Rates

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for the projected birth rates in the electoral wards of (i) Clonallon; and (ii) Seaview for each of the next three years.

(AQW 6367/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Birth rates are not projected at electoral ward level; fertility data for 2007 to 2009 has been supplied in the table below alongside Northern Ireland fertility data for these years.

Registration Year	Newry & Mourne Clonallon (95VV07)		Newry & Mourne Seaview (95VV24)		Northern Ireland	
	Births	Rate per 1,000 population	Births	Rate per 1,000 population	Births	Rate per 1,000 population
2007	57	12.7	34	10.9	24,451	13.9

Registration Year	Newry & Mourne Clonallan (95VV07)		Newry & Mourne Seaview (95VV24)		Northern Ireland	
	Births	Rate per 1,000 population	Births	Rate per 1,000 population	Births	Rate per 1,000 population
2008	58	12.9	36	11.4	25,631	14.4
2009 ^P	66	14.7*	42	13.3*	24,910	13.9**

P Provisional data

* 2009 birth rates for Clonallan and Seaview based on 2008 population estimate

** 2009 birth rate for Northern Ireland based on the latest Northern Ireland population projections for 2009

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Northern Ireland 2008;

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the uses made of the 38 horses listed in the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Northern Ireland 2008; and the 102 procedures carried out on them.

(AQW 3343/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The 102 procedures carried out on 38 horses in 2008 were completed for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. The cats were sourced from outside the countries of the Council of Europe (which includes the EU). They were used for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. Cats were used as they were the most suitable animal for the purpose of the research.

The eight cats and six dogs listed were first used in 2008 for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. These animals and those first used in previous years were certified as healthy by a veterinarian prior to reuse and this reduced the number of animals being used.

There is no limit to the number of times an animal can be reused provided that the animal remains healthy and suitable for the research. The severity limit for the procedures was mild.

No non-human primates have been used for research in Northern Ireland since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

This Act is regarded as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world, offering a high level of protection to animals whilst recognising the need to use animals in research. The Department and its Inspector are actively working to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are adhered to and that animals are used in scientific procedures only where this is fully justified

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Northern Ireland 2008

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) the source of the cats listed as coming from 'other sources', in the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Northern Ireland 2008; (ii) what they were used for; and (iii) what the justification was for using these specific animals.

(AQW 3344/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 102 procedures carried out on 38 horses in 2008 were completed for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. The cats were sourced from outside the countries of the Council of Europe (which includes the EU). They were used for the

purposes of research into veterinary medicine. Cats were used as they were the most suitable animal for the purpose of the research.

The eight cats and six dogs listed were first used in 2008 for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. These animals and those first used in previous years were certified as healthy by a veterinarian prior to reuse and this reduced the number of animals being used.

There is no limit to the number of times an animal can be reused provided that the animal remains healthy and suitable for the research. The severity limit for the procedures was mild.

No non-human primates have been used for research in Northern Ireland since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

This Act is regarded as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world, offering a high level of protection to animals whilst recognising the need to use animals in research. The Department and its Inspector are actively working to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are adhered to and that animals are used in scientific procedures only where this is fully justified

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Northern Ireland 2008

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) the uses made of the eight cats and six dogs listed in the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Northern Ireland 2008; (ii) why they were repeatedly re-used; (iii) if there is a limit on the number of times an animal can be re-used; and (iv) what the severity limit was for these procedures.

(AQW 3345/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 102 procedures carried out on 38 horses in 2008 were completed for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. The cats were sourced from outside the countries of the Council of Europe (which includes the EU). They were used for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. Cats were used as they were the most suitable animal for the purpose of the research.

The eight cats and six dogs listed were first used in 2008 for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. These animals and those first used in previous years were certified as healthy by a veterinarian prior to reuse and this reduced the number of animals being used.

There is no limit to the number of times an animal can be reused provided that the animal remains healthy and suitable for the research. The severity limit for the procedures was mild.

No non-human primates have been used for research in Northern Ireland since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

This Act is regarded as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world, offering a high level of protection to animals whilst recognising the need to use animals in research. The Department and its Inspector are actively working to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are adhered to and that animals are used in scientific procedures only where this is fully justified

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why abstracts for the project licences issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 do not feature on his Department's website.

(AQW 3346/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Because Northern Ireland is a relatively small geographical area, the Department does not publish abstracts for project licences on the Departmental website; this is to protect those working in research in Northern Ireland. Abstracts are forwarded to the Home Office to publish on a UK-wide basis.

Twenty-two new project licences were issued in 2008. Of these ten were of mild severity and 12 were of moderate severity. Of the 130 licences reporting returns in 2008, 62 were mild, 63 were moderate, 3 were substantial and 2 were unclassified.

Procedures on Living Animals

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new projects involving procedures on living animals were licensed in 2008; and what was the severity band of these procedures.

(AQW 3347/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Because Northern Ireland is a relatively small geographical area, the Department does not publish abstracts for project licences on the Departmental website; this is to protect those working in research in Northern Ireland. Abstracts are forwarded to the Home Office to publish on a UK-wide basis.

Twenty-two new project licences were issued in 2008. Of these ten were of mild severity and 12 were of moderate severity. Of the 130 licences reporting returns in 2008, 62 were mild, 63 were moderate, 3 were substantial and 2 were unclassified.

Animal Experiment Projects

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the severity band of the animal experiment projects reporting returns in 2008.

(AQW 3374/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Because Northern Ireland is a relatively small geographical area, the Department does not publish abstracts for project licences on the Departmental website; this is to protect those working in research in Northern Ireland. Abstracts are forwarded to the Home Office to publish on a UK-wide basis.

Twenty-two new project licences were issued in 2008. Of these ten were of mild severity and 12 were of moderate severity. Of the 130 licences reporting returns in 2008, 62 were mild, 63 were moderate, 3 were substantial and 2 were unclassified.

Animals Used for Toxicity Testing

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when an animal was last used for toxicity testing of (i) pollutants; (ii) agricultural products; or (iii) industrial chemicals.

(AQW 3376/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of pollutants in 2000. Animals were last used for toxicity testing of agricultural products in 2004. No animals have been used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of industrial chemicals, of cosmetic products or ingredients; of food additives; of household products; and for tobacco and alcohol research since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

Providing all the information requested on the 753 mice would breach statistical confidentiality relating to individual establishments. The procedures were of substantial severity.

Toxicology accounted for 6% of all procedures in 2008. An explanation as to why not all techniques are required is given in the introductory notes of the statistical publication available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/animal_stats_2008.pdf

Animals Used for Toxicity Testing

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when an animal was last used for toxicity testing (i) of cosmetic products or ingredients; (ii) of food additives; (iii) of household products; and (iv) for tobacco and alcohol research.

(AQW 3378/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of pollutants in 2000. Animals were last used for toxicity testing of agricultural products in 2004. No animals have been used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of industrial chemicals, of cosmetic products or ingredients; of food additives; of household products; and for tobacco and alcohol research since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

Providing all the information requested on the 753 mice would breach statistical confidentiality relating to individual establishments. The procedures were of substantial severity.

Toxicology accounted for 6% of all procedures in 2008. An explanation as to why not all techniques are required is given in the introductory notes of the statistical publication available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/animal_stats_2008.pdf

Animal Testing Procedures

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to animal testing procedures, when an animal was last used for education and training purposes.

(AQW 3380/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used for education and training purposes in 2006.

There is one inspector of animal research facilities in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland 11 facilities have been in operation since 2005. The Inspector has visited all 11 facilities during this period.

The number of animals used in 2008 was 17,077, an increase of 12.7% from the 15,154 used in 2007. Significant percentage fluctuations in the statistics in Northern Ireland are common, owing to the relatively small numbers of animals used. The numbers of animal procedures carried out in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990 are as follows.

Year	No. of Procedures	Year	No. of Procedures
1990	14,684	2000	14,742
1991	17,160	2001	15,269
1992	21,360	2002	19,566
1993	15,062	2003	19,379
1994	16,799	2004	20,805
1995	12,610	2005	18,095
1996	15,291	2006	17,434
1997	16,704	2007	15,525
1998	15,711	2008	17,875
1999	14,547		

The development of a number of new drugs, and medical and veterinary technologies, which help to reduce suffering and prevent large-scale infections among humans and animals continues to depend on use of animals

Non-human Primate

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when an experiment was last carried out on a non-human primate.

(AQW 3382/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 102 procedures carried out on 38 horses in 2008 were completed for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. The cats were sourced from outside the countries of the Council of Europe (which includes the EU). They were used for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. Cats were used as they were the most suitable animal for the purpose of the research.

The eight cats and six dogs listed were first used in 2008 for the purposes of research into veterinary medicine. These animals and those first used in previous years were certified as healthy by a veterinarian prior to reuse and this reduced the number of animals being used.

There is no limit to the number of times an animal can be reused provided that the animal remains healthy and suitable for the research. The severity limit for the procedures was mild.

No non-human primates have been used for research in Northern Ireland since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

This Act is regarded as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world, offering a high level of protection to animals whilst recognising the need to use animals in research. The Department and its Inspector are actively working to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are adhered to and that animals are used in scientific procedures only where this is fully justified

Animal Research Facility Inspectors

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many animal research facility inspectors are currently employed; and (ii) how many facilities have they visited since 2005.

(AQW 3431/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used for education and training purposes in 2006.

There is one inspector of animal research facilities in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland 11 facilities have been in operation since 2005. The Inspector has visited all 11 facilities during this period.

The number of animals used in 2008 was 17,077, an increase of 12.7% from the 15,154 used in 2007. Significant percentage fluctuations in the statistics in Northern Ireland are common, owing to the relatively small numbers of animals used. The numbers of animal procedures carried out in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990 are as follows.

Year	No. of Procedures	Year	No. of Procedures
1990	14,684	2000	14,742
1991	17,160	2001	15,269
1992	21,360	2002	19,566
1993	15,062	2003	19,379
1994	16,799	2004	20,805
1995	12,610	2005	18,095
1996	15,291	2006	17,434
1997	16,704	2007	15,525

Year	No. of Procedures	Year	No. of Procedures
1998	15,711	2008	17,875
1999	14,547		

The development of a number of new drugs, and medical and veterinary technologies, which help to reduce suffering and prevent large-scale infections among humans and animals continues to depend on use of animals

Mice Used in Toxicology Tests

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what procedures were carried out on the 753 mice used in 'other toxicology' tests for 'other food stuffs', as shown in the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Northern Ireland 2008; (ii) for what purposes the mice were used; and (iii) the severity level of the tests involved.

(AQW 3432/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of pollutants in 2000. Animals were last used for toxicity testing of agricultural products in 2004. No animals have been used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of industrial chemicals, of cosmetic products or ingredients; of food additives; of household products; and for tobacco and alcohol research since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

Providing all the information requested on the 753 mice would breach statistical confidentiality relating to individual establishments. The procedures were of substantial severity.

Toxicology accounted for 6% of all procedures in 2008. An explanation as to why not all techniques are required is given in the introductory notes of the statistical publication available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/animal_stats_2008.pdf

Animals Used for Toxicity Testing

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Northern Ireland 2008 records all procedures conducted on animals as 'other toxicology' procedures; (ii) what these procedures entailed; and (iii) why they were conducted.

(AQW 3433/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of pollutants in 2000. Animals were last used for toxicity testing of agricultural products in 2004. No animals have been used in Northern Ireland for toxicity testing of industrial chemicals, of cosmetic products or ingredients; of food additives; of household products; and for tobacco and alcohol research since the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

Providing all the information requested on the 753 mice would breach statistical confidentiality relating to individual establishments. The procedures were of substantial severity.

Toxicology accounted for 6% of all procedures in 2008. An explanation as to why not all techniques are required is given in the introductory notes of the statistical publication available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/animal_stats_2008.pdf

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Northern Ireland 2008

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Northern Ireland 2008 show an 18% increase in the number of animals used compared to 2007.

(AQW 3436/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used for education and training purposes in 2006.

There is one inspector of animal research facilities in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland 11 facilities have been in operation since 2005. The Inspector has visited all 11 facilities during this period.

The number of animals used in 2008 was 17,077, an increase of 12.7% from the 15,154 used in 2007. Significant percentage fluctuations in the statistics in Northern Ireland are common, owing to the relatively small numbers of animals used. The numbers of animal procedures carried out in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990 are as follows.

Year	No. of Procedures	Year	No. of Procedures
1990	14,684	2000	14,742
1991	17,160	2001	15,269
1992	21,360	2002	19,566
1993	15,062	2003	19,379
1994	16,799	2004	20,805
1995	12,610	2005	18,095
1996	15,291	2006	17,434
1997	16,704	2007	15,525
1998	15,711	2008	17,875
1999	14,547		

The development of a number of new drugs, and medical and veterinary technologies, which help to reduce suffering and prevent large-scale infections among humans and animals continues to depend on use of animals

Animal Experiments

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many animal experiments have taken place in each year since 1990.

(AQW 3437/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Animals were last used for education and training purposes in 2006.

There is one inspector of animal research facilities in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland 11 facilities have been in operation since 2005. The Inspector has visited all 11 facilities during this period.

The number of animals used in 2008 was 17,077, an increase of 12.7% from the 15,154 used in 2007. Significant percentage fluctuations in the statistics in Northern Ireland are common, owing to the relatively small numbers of animals used. The numbers of animal procedures carried out in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990 are as follows.

Year	No. of Procedures	Year	No. of Procedures
1990	14,684	2000	14,742
1991	17,160	2001	15,269
1992	21,360	2002	19,566
1993	15,062	2003	19,379

Year	No. of Procedures	Year	No. of Procedures
1994	16,799	2004	20,805
1995	12,610	2005	18,095
1996	15,291	2006	17,434
1997	16,704	2007	15,525
1998	15,711	2008	17,875
1999	14,547		

The development of a number of new drugs, and medical and veterinary technologies, which help to reduce suffering and prevent large-scale infections among humans and animals continues to depend on use of animals

Hospital Car Parks

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of cars that have been clamped in hospital car parks in each of the last 5 years, broken down by hospital.

(AQW 4662/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The car parking policy for the Health & Social Care Sector permits wheel clamping “for persistent or serious unauthorised parking”. The numbers of vehicles clamped in hospital car parks by hospital from 2005 – 2010 is as follow:

Hospital	Altnagelvin	Ulster	Belfast City	Mater	Royal Group
Total number of vehicles clamped	12	3262	392	174	52

No Smoking Campaigns

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the total amount spent on ‘no smoking’ campaigns in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4999/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Public and professional information campaigns on dangers of smoking	£743,282	£397,221	£419,257

In 2006/07 the smoking prevalence rate amongst adults was 25% and this reduced further to 24% by 2008/09. Prevalence is significantly down from the 1996/97 figure of 29%.

Obesity Awareness Campaigns

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the amount spent on obesity awareness campaigns in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5000/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My department in partnership with the Public Health Agency, the Food Standards Agency, and Safefood has taken forward a range of actions, at both the local and regional level, to raise awareness and encourage people to address the main lifestyle issues that can cause obesity. A particular focus has been given to encouraging and empowering people to eat a healthy diet and participate in regular physical activity.

Significant progress has been made to date to tackle the prevent obesity including:

- clearer food labelling;
- tougher restrictions on advertising food which is high in fat, salt and sugar;
- healthier school food for children which will contribute to childhood nutrition and the knowledge to make healthy food choices;
- Cook It! Programmes which enhance cooking skills and healthier eating on a budget;
- disseminated a range of nutrition and dental health guidelines for professionals
- the development of the new Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation; and
- promotion of healthy lifestyles in a range of settings, such as the workplace, schools, and communities.

It is not possible to quantify the amount spent on this specifically.

Domiciliary Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the average length of time people are remaining as hospital in-patients due to the lack of domiciliary care, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 5069/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

People Sent to the UK Mainland for Operations

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were sent to the UK mainland for operations, excluding heart operations, in each of the last three years, broken down by type of operation.

(AQW 5079/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on how many people were sent to the UK mainland for operations in each of the last three years, broken down by type of operation, is not available.

Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the revised 'Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy: The Law and Clinical Practice in Northern Ireland', (i) if legal advice was sought on whether this revised guidance complied with the order of the Court of Appeal in the case of 'Family Planning Association of Northern Ireland v Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety' of 8 October 2004 before it was issued; and whether this legal advice was sought from outside the Department; and (ii) whether the removal of the section on conscientious objection was subject to an equality impact assessment before the revised guidance was issued.

(AQW 5132/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) In line with advice from senior counsel briefed on behalf of the Department, interim Guidance was issued on the Termination of Pregnancy. It is clear when reading the interim Guidance that its effect is temporary and that it is the intention of the Department to publish a further and final

version which will contain sections dealing with counselling and conscientious objection in order to fully comply with the Order of the Court of Appeal in the Family Planning Association Case. However, I can inform you that the Family Planning Association has welcomed the issue of this interim guidance while the Department works towards issuing full guidance as soon as possible.

- (ii) The law on the termination of pregnancy remains a reserved matter. The Department is producing Guidance on the law and therefore the removal of the section on conscientious objection was not subjected to an equality impact assessment before the interim Guidance was issued. However, in order to be inclusive the two adverse sections will be revised and then subjected to full public consultation. Following consultation they will then submit them to the Executive Committee for consideration.

Nursing and Residential Care

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the 'liable relative rule' in relation to contributions for nursing and residential care has been abolished in Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 5239/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 'liable relative rule' is contained within Article 100 and 101 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 under which husbands or wives are 'liable' to maintain their spouse or civil partner, including maintaining them in residential care, and may be taken to court by the Trust if they fail to do so. This provision has not yet been repealed in Northern Ireland, although my intention is that it should be, as soon as a suitable legislative vehicle can be identified. Until that is possible, HSC Trusts are not applying the rule.

Cuts to Services in the Colin Area of West Belfast

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any cuts to services in the Colin area of west Belfast as a result of his Department's efficiency savings.

(AQW 5438/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An assessment is taking place to prioritise services in an attempt to minimise the impact on those who avail of health and social care.

My officials are engaging with organisations to deliver the £113.5m cuts that are being imposed on my Department's budget that were voted through the Assembly. This is on top of efficiency savings of £700m across a health service that is already underfunded and overstretched. In this context, it is to be expected that commissioners will assess funding proposals on a case by case basis and that some services will be impacted upon.

Children: Teeth Extraction

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many children aged 13 or under had teeth extracted, broken down by age, in each of the last five years; and (ii) how many (a) milk; and (b) permanent teeth were extracted in total.

(AQW 5579/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on Health Service treatment carried out in the Trusts by the Community Dental Service is not held centrally and can only be collected directly from the Trusts at disproportionate effort.

Natural Teeth

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) males; and (ii) females aged (a) 10 or below; (b) 11 to 20; (c) 21 to 30; (d) 31 to 40; (e) 41 to 50; (f) 51 to 60; (g) 61 to 70; (h) 71 to 80; and (i) 81 and over are estimated to have no natural teeth.

(AQW 5580/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on Health Service treatment carried out in the Trusts by the Community Dental Service is not held centrally and can only be collected directly from the Trusts at disproportionate effort.

Wakehurst Building in the City Hospital

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the total cost of the refurbishment of the Wakehurst Building in the City Hospital; (ii) the intended objectives of this refurbishment; (iii) what services and teams operated from the Wakehurst Building in (a) 2006; (b) 2007; (c) 2008; and (d) 2009; and (iv) what services currently operate from this site.

(AQW 5588/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) In 2005, £200,000 was spent on refurbishment of areas within the Wakehurst Building
- (ii) This work was to redecorate and upgrade patient areas in the Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit.
- (iii) Services which moved out of Wakehurst building in 2008

Service / Function	Service Group
Social Services	Older People, Medicine and Surgery (OPMS)
Medical Secretaries	OPMS

Services which moved out of Wakehurst building in 2009

(iv) Services currently operating from Wakehurst building – March 2010

Service / Function	Service Group
Medical illustration	Clinical Services
Physio Back Care Training	Clinical Services
X-ray Department	Clinical Services
Osteoporosis Clinic	Head & Skeletal
Day Hospital	OPMS
Resuscitation Training	Clinical Services
Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit	

Children with Dentures or False Teeth

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children aged 13 years or under had dentures or false teeth fitted in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5636/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on Health Service treatment carried out in the Trusts by the Community Dental Service is not held centrally and can only be collected directly from the Trusts at disproportionate effort.

Retailers Prosecuted for Selling Tobacco to Minors

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many retailers have been prosecuted for selling tobacco to minors in each of the last five years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 5651/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Details of retailer prosecutions for sales of tobacco products to minors* in each year since 2005, broken down by district council, are shown in the following table;

Council	Prosecutions				
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Belfast	0	1	1	2	19
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0
Ards	0	0	0	0	0
Down	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	1	0	0	0	0
Antrim	0	0	0	2	1
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	3	0	0	3	1
Larne	0	0	0	0	2
Magherafelt	0	0	0	7	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	7	0
Craigavon	2	0	1	0	7
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	0	0	0
Derry	0	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0

* From 1 September 2008 the minimum age of sale for purchasing tobacco products was raised from 16 to 18 years of age.

Basic Salary for Doctors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current average annual basic salary for a doctor practising as (i) a general practitioner; (ii) a surgeon; (iii) a consultant; and (iv) a registrar.

(AQW 5678/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The most recent information held relates to 2007/8 where the average income of a GP contractor in Northern Ireland was £91,056.

There are complex contractual arrangements consultants and registrars and average basic salaries are not held. However, the current basic salary ranges are;

- (ii) Surgeons £74,504 - £100,446
(iii) Consultants £74,504 - £100,446
(iv) Registrars £29,411 - £46,246

Ambulance Callout Time

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of recorded incidents where it has taken an ambulance over one hour to reach the scene of an emergency in each of the last five years; and to detail the longest callout time during this period.

(AQW 5983/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the requested information:

Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
NIAS response over one hour	36	7	13	6	4

It is not possible to provide data on the longest callout time during this period.

Physiotherapy for Patients with Multiple Sclerosis

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision of physiotherapy for patients with Multiple Sclerosis is provided by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 6018/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Trust is committed to providing flexible and responsive services to all patients referred for assessment and treatment. People with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) can access Physiotherapy in a range of settings, including:

- As an inpatient within Hospital
- As an outpatient in community settings and
- Via a domiciliary visit if deemed appropriate.

Staff with specialist neurological skills are employed in specific services, such as the Community Stroke Team or the Acute Inpatient Team.

Vacant Physiotherapy Posts

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of established, budgeted and otherwise agreed, vacant physiotherapy posts in each Health and Social Care Trust and in total on (a) 1 March 2009; and (b) 1 March 2010, broken down by grade.

(AQW 6046/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the tables below.

PHYSIOTHERAPIST VACANCIES

BELFAST TRUST

Physiotherapist Grade	1 March 2009	1 March 2010
	WTE	WTE
Band 5	33.00	11.00
Band 6	14.00	21.20
Band 7	6.00	11.9
Band 8A	0.00	1.00
Total	53.00	45.10

NORTHERN TRUST

Physiotherapist Grade	1 March 2009	1 March 2010
	WTE	WTE
Band 5	2.00	3.00
Band 6	0.50	3.00
Total	2.50	6.00

SOUTH EASTERN TRUST

Physiotherapist Grade	1 March 2009	1 March 2010
	WTE	WTE
Band 5	2.00	1.00
Band 6	4.00	1.50
Total	6.00	2.50

SOUTHERN TRUST

Physiotherapist Grade	1 March 2009	1 March 2010
	WTE	WTE
Band 6	3.44	NV
Band 7	4.84	NV
Band 8A	1.00	NV
Total	9.28	NV

WESTERN TRUST

Physiotherapist Grade	1 March 2009	1 March 2010
	WTE	WTE
Band 5	0.00	2.00
Band 6	0.00	4.50
Total	0.00	6.50

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

1. WTE= whole-time equivalent
2. NV = Not available
3. Southern Trust figures are as at 31 March.

Physiotherapists

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many physiotherapists were on (i) maternity leave; (ii) a career break; and (iii) long-term sick leave on (a) 1 March 2009; and (b) 1 March 2010 broken down by grade.

(AQW 6047/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the tables below.

Number of Physiotherapists on (i) maternity leave; (ii) career break; and (iii) long-term sick leave as at 1 March 2009 by grade.

Grade	Maternity Leave	Career Break	Long-term sick
	WTE	WTE	WTE
Band 5	6.00	2.00	1.00
Band 6	23.20	0.00	1.17
Band 7	14.27	1.50	1.43
Band 8A	2.91	0.00	0.00
Band 8B	0.00	0.50	1.00
Total	46.38	4.00	4.60

Number of Physiotherapists on (i) maternity leave; (ii) career break; and (iii) long-term sick leave as at 1 March 2010 by grade.

Grade	Maternity Leave	Career Break	Long-term sick
	WTE	WTE	WTE
Band 5	11.09	3.00	6.00
Band 6	26.32	4.99	3.58
Band 7	13.77	1.50	4.48
Band 8A	1.00	0.00	3.00

	Maternity Leave	Career Break	Long-term sick
Grade	WTE	WTE	WTE
Band 8B	0.00	0.50	0.00
Total	52.18	9.99	17.06

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

1. WTE= whole-time equivalent

Patient Mortality Rate

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department takes when a hospital has a higher than expected patient mortality rate.

(AQW 6049/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Meaningful judgements on quality of care cannot rely on any single summary statistic, including patient mortality rates. In the circumstances described, Trusts are expected to draw on their systems that monitor internal safety and quality. These, together with the results of external inspections provide a range of qualitative and quantitative data to inform necessary action. If the analysis of these data raises concerns about safety or quality, the matter will be addressed initially by the relevant Trust and escalated as appropriate. As part of the continuous development of quality indicators, the Health and Social Care Board is examining the benefit of introducing standardised mortality ratios for each trust.

Asbestos

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5590/10, to detail any findings of asbestos in the Wakehurst Building at Belfast City Hospital.

(AQW 6058/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Asbestos has been identified, labelled and categorised within the Wakehurst Building in the following locations:

Low Risk

- Insulation to pipes
- Floor tiles
- Gaskets on wall-mounted radiator
- Insulating board on radiator
- Gasket on bed pan washer

Medium Risk

- Insulation to an external pipe.

Muscular Dystrophy Care Advisor Posts

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding he has ringfenced for Muscular Dystrophy care advisor posts in the 2010/11 financial year; and how much funding will be provided for these posts over the next three years.

(AQW 6069/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Discussions between the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Health and Social Care Board about the recurrent funding of a Neuromuscular

Care Advisor post are ongoing. Until these are complete the allocation of funding towards this post cannot be confirmed.

Free Hospital Car Parks

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that free hospital car parks are used only by those with business at the hospital.

(AQW 6070/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My officials meet regularly with representatives from the Health & Social Care Trusts to discuss car parking issues including misuse of free hospital car parks.

Free Hospital Car Parks

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the extent of the misuse of free hospital car parks by those who do not have business at the hospital.

(AQW 6071/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A formal assessment of car parking at Lagan Valley Hospital was carried out recently by a car parking expert and significant misuse was highlighted. In all hospital car parking sites where it is free to park, Trusts' security staff keep misuse under review.

Organs Donated

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number and types of organs which have been donated by deceased donors from Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6072/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following table shows the number of each type of organ donated by deceased donors in Northern Ireland in each of the last five financial years:

Organ	Year of Donation			
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Kidneys	38	68	42	40
Pancreas	2	7	6	5
Livers	17	32	18	21
Hearts	4	7	6	5
Lungs	7	15	9	13
Total	68	129	81	83

* Provisional figures, subject to further validation

Information for 2009/10 is not available

Land at Knock Golf Club

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what correspondence there has been between his Department, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Planning Service in relation to the development of housing on land leased by the Trust to Knock Golf Club.

(AQW 6075/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There has been no correspondence between the Department and the Planning Service in relation to the development of housing on land leased by the Trust to Knock Golf Club.

The Department has not entered into any correspondence with respect to supporting a planning application for housing on land leased by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to Knock Golf Club, nor has it indicated in any way support for such an application.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has met with Knock Golf Club (KGC) on a number of occasions from July 2003. These meetings were established to discuss the lands leased to the Golf Club from the Trust (100 year period dating from 1956).

On 1 February 2008 the Trust wrote to KGC welcoming the prospect of early release of lands which could potentially assist in the Ulster Hospital redevelopment. The Trust also acknowledged the benefit that could accrue from the inclusion of affordable residential units located in the vicinity of the hospital, as this housing could be suitable for Trust staff.

On 6 October 2009 the Trust met with KGC to provide an update on the Hospital redevelopment and to allow KGC to update the Trust on progress with their development. At this meeting, whilst the Trust recognised that there may be some benefit in having access to additional lands, this was not essential to the current redevelopment proposals, and therefore was not being pursued.

Land at Knock Golf Club

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the correspondence sent to the Planning Service from his Department supporting a planning application for housing on land leased by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to Knock Golf Club; and if this correspondence had the approval of the Trust.

(AQW 6079/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There has been no correspondence between the Department and the Planning Service in relation to the development of housing on land leased by the Trust to Knock Golf Club.

The Department has not entered into any correspondence with respect to supporting a planning application for housing on land leased by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to Knock Golf Club, nor has it indicated in any way support for such an application.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has met with Knock Golf Club (KGC) on a number of occasions from July 2003. These meetings were established to discuss the lands leased to the Golf Club from the Trust (100 year period dating from 1956).

On 1 February 2008 the Trust wrote to KGC welcoming the prospect of early release of lands which could potentially assist in the Ulster Hospital redevelopment. The Trust also acknowledged the benefit that could accrue from the inclusion of affordable residential units located in the vicinity of the hospital, as this housing could be suitable for Trust staff.

On 6 October 2009 the Trust met with KGC to provide an update on the Hospital redevelopment and to allow KGC to update the Trust on progress with their development. At this meeting, whilst the Trust recognised that there may be some benefit in having access to additional lands, this was not essential to the current redevelopment proposals, and therefore was not being pursued.

Land at Knock Golf Club

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the correspondence sent to the Planning Service by his Department or the South Eastern Health and Social Trust indicating that the Trust has no interest in the planning application for housing on land leased by the Trust to Knock Golf Club.

(AQW 6081/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There has been no correspondence between the Department and the Planning Service in relation to the development of housing on land leased by the Trust to Knock Golf Club.

The Department has not entered into any correspondence with respect to supporting a planning application for housing on land leased by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to Knock Golf Club, nor has it indicated in any way support for such an application.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has met with Knock Golf Club (KGC) on a number of occasions from July 2003. These meetings were established to discuss the lands leased to the Golf Club from the Trust (100 year period dating from 1956).

On 1 February 2008 the Trust wrote to KGC welcoming the prospect of early release of lands which could potentially assist in the Ulster Hospital redevelopment. The Trust also acknowledged the benefit that could accrue from the inclusion of affordable residential units located in the vicinity of the hospital, as this housing could be suitable for Trust staff.

On 6 October 2009 the Trust met with KGC to provide an update on the Hospital redevelopment and to allow KGC to update the Trust on progress with their development. At this meeting, whilst the Trust recognised that there may be some benefit in having access to additional lands, this was not essential to the current redevelopment proposals, and therefore was not being pursued.

Minors Charged with Criminal Offences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role Social Services have in dealing with minors, charged with criminal offences, who are being processed through youth courts; and if they are involved in decisions relating to specific bail conditions.

(AQW 6088/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Any young person subject to a Care Order who is charged with a criminal offence and appears before the Youth Court will have Social Services involvement. This may involve supporting the young person through the process or providing written or oral input to the proceedings as required. Social Services may also play a part in delivering any community-based disposal handed down by the District Judge. The majority of young people appearing before the Youth Court will not however have had previous Social Services involvement and therefore will be dealt with by the relevant criminal justice agencies.

Social Services may occasionally be invited by the Youth Court, High Court or the police to comment on the suitability of bail conditions for a child who is known to them. Decisions relating to the setting of specific bail conditions are however the responsibility of the PSNI and the Courts.

DEXA Scans on Bone Density

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4917/10, if he will publish the findings of the review by the Health and Social Care Board of referrals to secondary care for DEXA scans on bone density.

(AQW 6121/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The review of DEXA scans referred to in AQW 4917/10 was an internal exercise undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board (the Board) to establish the level of demand for this service in order to ensure sufficient capacity was in place to achieve the maximum waiting time target of nine weeks for all diagnostic tests, including DEXA scans.

The Board does not routinely release working documents of this nature into the public domain as they are not written for that purpose.

Desertcreat Police College

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Desertcreat Police College project for the development of Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Services.
(AQW 6122/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This is a joint training project for the police, prison and fire and rescue services.

My Department has been working closely with the NIO (now Department of Justice) and the relevant services to develop the business case for the new joint training facility at Desertcreat. The business case is currently being appraised by my officials and we will in due course advise the lead department, now the Department of Justice of our assessment.

Due to current and anticipated funding constraints, it is important that I review current priorities, including the Desertcreat Training College, in order to ensure that the limited resources available to me are targeted to those areas of greatest need. Once there is greater clarity surrounding the availability of capital funding, particularly in the next CSR, I will be in a better position to make a firm commitment to this scheme.

Desertcreat Police College

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he can confirm that his Department will provide £30 million towards the construction of the Desertcreat College in Cookstown for the Police, Prison, and Fire and Rescue services.
(AQW 6126/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This is a joint training project for the police, prison and fire and rescue services.

My Department has been working closely with the NIO (now Department of Justice) and the relevant services to develop the business case for the new joint training facility at Desertcreat. The business case is currently being appraised by my officials and we will in due course advise the lead department, now the Department of Justice of our assessment.

Due to current and anticipated funding constraints, it is important that I review current priorities, including the Desertcreat Training College, in order to ensure that the limited resources available to me are targeted to those areas of greatest need. Once there is greater clarity surrounding the availability of capital funding, particularly in the next CSR, I will be in a better position to make a firm commitment to this scheme.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he intends to take to ensure that there is increased information available on (i) instances of multiple sclerosis; and (ii) resources available for people with multiple sclerosis.
(AQW 6134/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to provide increased information on instances of Multiple Sclerosis. Services for people with a disability, including those with MS, are provided by Health and Social Care Trusts on the basis of individually assessed need and not a specific disability. Consequently, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of resources available for people with MS beyond that of the relevant Programme of Care.

Regional Health and Social Care Board

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the proposed change to the staffing structure within the western office of the Regional Health

and Social Care Board following the Review of Public Administration, which would see thirteen posts reduced to five across all levels.

(AQW 6143/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decisions have been taken on a reduction in Health and Social Care posts within the Health and Social Care Board.

Regional Health and Social Care Board

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the centralisation of Health Service posts on the work-life balance of staff currently based in the western office of the Regional Health and Social Care Board.

(AQW 6145/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decisions have been taken on the centralisation of Health and Social Care posts within the Health and Social Care Board.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional assistance his Department intends to provide for people with Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 6146/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently exploring ways of providing better support, education and training to clinicians, patients and families and carers of people with neurological conditions, including those with MS. In addition, a Disability Strategy, which will include neuro-disability, is currently being developed which will complement existing strategies and partnerships to improve the health and well being of all people with a disability in Northern Ireland.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what physiotherapy outreach facilities are provided for people with Multiple Sclerosis by his Department.

(AQW 6148/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is committed to providing flexible and responsive services to all patients referred for assessment and treatment. All staff endeavour to see all clients at a venue most suitable to them which meets their treatment needs. People with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) access Physiotherapy Services at various sites across each Trust in Northern Ireland, including hospitals, health centres and other venues in the community, such as the Bayview Resource Centre in Bangor and the Fort Centre, Coleraine. In addition, patients who have impaired mobility and have difficulty travelling to appointments may receive a domiciliary visit by a Physiotherapist where this is considered appropriate in order to meet their clinical needs.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Neuro Physiotherapists are exclusively dedicated to working with people with Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 6149/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no Neuro Physiotherapists exclusively dedicated to working with people with multiple sclerosis.

Whilst there are no specialist physiotherapists assigned exclusively to work with Multiple Sclerosis patients, sufferers are assessed and treated by specialist physiotherapists with neuro-disability skills in all of the five Health and Social Care Trusts as part of their caseload

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what resources his Department has allocated to physiotherapy treatment for people with Multiple Sclerosis in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6151/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The HSC Board and the Public Health Agency are responsible for the allocation of funding and the commissioning of services from service providers based on local needs and priorities.

As such, this information is not held centrally and could only be provided for the last three years at disproportionate cost.

Benefits for People with Parkinson's Disease

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has had any discussions with the Benefits Office in relation to making people with Parkinson's Disease aware of all the benefits to which they are entitled.

(AQW 6158/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have had no discussions with the Benefits Office in relation to making people with Parkinson's disease aware of all the benefits to which they are entitled.

Confidential Patient Records

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any Health Trusts send confidential patient records to be processed outside Northern Ireland.

(AQW 6187/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health Trusts do not send confidential patient records to be processed outside Northern Ireland.

Parkinson's Disease

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in each constituency currently have Parkinson's disease.

(AQW 6205/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of people who currently have Parkinson's disease.

Parkinson's Disease

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money his Department has set aside in the last three years for people with Parkinson's disease.

(AQW 6208/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The HSC Board and the Public Health Agency are responsible for the allocation of funding and the commissioning of services from service providers based on local needs and priorities.

As such, this information is not held centrally and could only be provided for the last three years at disproportionate cost.

Victims of People Trafficking

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has any plans to establish a dedicated Health and Social Care team to work with the victims of people trafficking.

(AQW 6228/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Northern Ireland, responsibility for implementing the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings which was ratified by the United Kingdom in December 2008, primarily falls to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the recruitment adverts issued in the last year to (i) the print media; (ii) the broadcast media; and (iii) all other forms of media by (a) his Department; and (b) the South Eastern Health Trust to recruit medical staff for the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick.

(AQW 6284/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (a) My Department does not recruit staff for posts within HSC Trusts; the employment of staff is the responsibility of HSC Trusts.
- (b) The information below regarding the advertisements for the recruitment of medical staff is not held centrally and has been supplied by SE HSC Trust:

Post	Specialty	Advertised
Locum Appointments for Training	General Medicine	Belfast Telegraph, Irish News
Consultant Anaesthetist	Anaesthetics	Belfast Telegraph, BMJ
Consultant in Geriatric Medicine	General Medicine	Belfast Telegraph, BMJ
Locum Appointments for Training CT1 /2 Level	General Medicine	Belfast Telegraph
Foundation Year 2 Posts	General Medicine	Belfast Telegraph, Irish News

Source: SE HSC Trust

Physiotherapy for Curvature of the Spine

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children currently receive on-going physiotherapy for curvature of the spine; and how many children had this treatment withdrawn last year in the South Eastern Health Trust.

(AQW 6320/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Downe Hospital

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to outline the criteria used to recruit doctors for the Accident and Emergency Unit in the Downe Hospital, including the minimum qualifications required; (ii) how many doctors were interviewed; and (ii) of those who were not successful, to outline the reasons given.

(AQW 6327/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Recruitment and selection of staff is a matter for the Trust and my Department does not hold this information centrally.

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the proposed car parking charges being considered for the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick, including the hourly fee for (i) members of the public; and (ii) staff.

(AQW 6377/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not currently considering any proposals regarding car parking at the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick.

Waterside Hospital in Derry

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 6131/10, to define the term 'interim accommodation', given that Ward 3 in the Waterside Hospital was intended for short term assessment .

(AQW 6400/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust advises that the term "interim accommodation" means until a replacement inpatient and assessment centre for older people is provided.

Displaced Staff in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of displaced staff in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 6413/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust state that they currently have 24 displaced staff. All of these staff are covering either staff shortages or specific work identified as needed within the Trust.

Car Parking Charges

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of car parking charges in (i) the Ulster Hospital; and (ii) the Lagan Valley Hospital.

(AQW 6414/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The charges for parking at the Ulster Hospital are as follows:

- (i) For the public: Up to 1 hour - £1.20; 1–4 hours - £1.80; 4–6 hours - £2.50; 6–8 hours - £3.50; Over 8 hours - £6.00.
- (ii) For staff: £11 per month for full time staff and £8 per month for those staff working less than 30 hours per week.

There are no charges for parking at the Lagan Valley Hospital.

Injections of the Enzyme Collagenase

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why injections of the enzyme collagenase, which may help to treat Dupuytren's Contracture, is not being offered to people with this condition as an alternative to surgery.

(AQW 6431/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This product is not yet licensed for use in the UK. I would not expect new drugs to be generally available on the health service until they have been licensed and their safety and clinical and cost effectiveness assessed.

Domiciliary Care from External Providers

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on domiciliary care from external providers in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in the last 12 months; including a breakdown of wage costs.

(AQW 6521/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The spend on domiciliary care from external providers for the period April 2009 to March 2010 is not held centrally and would only be available from HSC Trusts at disproportionate cost.

Women and Children's Hospital

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Women and Children's Hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

(AQW 6525/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My capital budget has been reduced by £21.5m in 2010/11. This decision was taken following the Assembly's decision to cut spending in my Department. This will mean that my planned capital programme, including the new Women's and Children's Hospital, which is designed to address the legacy of under investment in health, is likely to be further delayed.

Department of Justice

Police Officers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many serving police officers are currently (i) on restricted duties; or (ii) suspended from duty as a result of a charge being brought against them.

(AQW 6207/10)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): The conduct and discipline of police officers is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable who will respond to you directly.

Electronic Monitoring

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people, currently on remand, are subject to electronic monitoring as part of their bail conditions, in each constituency; and how many are juveniles.

(AQW 6211/10)

Minister of Justice: As at Friday 16 April 2010, there were 168 adults and 19 juveniles (under 18 years old) subject to electronic monitoring in Northern Ireland as one of their bail conditions. The table below details the breakdown of where the individuals were being monitored by constituency.

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SUBJECT TO ELECTRONIC MONITORING AS ONE OF THEIR BAIL CONDITIONS AS AT FRIDAY 16 APRIL 2010

Constituency	Adults	Juveniles
Belfast East	9	0

Constituency	Adults	Juveniles
Belfast North	14	7
Belfast South	15	0
Belfast West	21	4
East Antrim	7	0
East Londonderry	5	0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	3	1
Foyle	29	2
Lagan Valley	6	0
Mid Ulster	8	0
Newry & Armagh	9	0
North Antrim	10	1
North Down	2	1
South Antrim	10	1
South Down	11	1
Strangford	2	0
Upper Bann	4	0
West Tyrone	3	1
Total	168	19

Electronic Monitoring

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convicted offenders are currently subject to electronic monitoring in each constituency; and how many are juveniles.

(AQW 6230/10)

Minister of Justice: At this stage, the vast majority of those who are subject to electronic monitoring are on bail and therefore have not been convicted of an offence. As at Friday 16 April 2010, there were 3 adults subject to an electronic monitoring requirement as a condition of their community sentence in the Belfast West, East Londonderry and Lagan Valley constituencies respectively. There were no juveniles (under 18 years old) subject to an electronic monitoring requirement as a condition of their community sentence.

Policing of Parades in 2010

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice what impact the policing of parades in 2010 will have on his Department's budget and resources.

(AQW 6257/10)

Minister of Justice: The costs associated with policing parades are in the first instance the responsibility of the Chief Constable who is accountable to the Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly. I will of course continue to keep parading matters under review over the coming months.

Police Officers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of police officers who left the PSNI, under a Patten severance package, who were subsequently re-employed as 'civilian experts' or consultants; (ii) how much these individuals have been paid for their services; (iii) the number of such individuals currently employed by the PSNI; and (iv) in what capacity they are employed.

(AQW 6285/10)

Minister of Justice: The operation of the severance scheme and the engagement of consultants are matters for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Police Officers

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans to get more police officers on to the beat.

(AQW 6290/10)

Minister of Justice: The deployment of officers and staff is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

I am extremely supportive of the Chief Constable's commitment to increasing the front line capability of the PSNI and I am sure that this will help to increase public confidence in the police's ability to tackle crime.

Hollywood Police Station

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice if he has any plans to re-open Hollywood police station on a 24-hour basis.

(AQW 6291/10)

Minister of Justice: The operation of police stations is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Police Officers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many police officers who left the PSNI or the RUC, under any Patten severance package, subsequently returned to serve as police officers in the PSNI.

(AQW 6345/10)

Minister of Justice: The regulations governing the severance arrangements for the PSNI stipulate that anyone who leaves on severance and rejoins the PSNI as an officer within five years must repay any severance lump-sum payment they received. The application of these regulations is a matter for the Chief Constable.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable who will respond directly.

Sex Offenders

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice what protocols and legislation exist to ensure that sex offenders from outside the UK register with the relevant authorities when entering the UK; and if he has any plans to bring forward further legislation on this issue.

(AQW 6417/10)

Minister of Justice: The Sexual Offences Act 2003 contains a power for the police to apply to the courts for a notification order in respect of an offender who is in the jurisdiction, or who they believe is intending to come to the jurisdiction, and who has been convicted of a sexual offence outside the jurisdiction. This civil order attaches to the offender the notification requirements of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Policy proposals for legislative change have been issued for public consultation which would tighten the law to place the onus on offenders to notify the police on arrival in the jurisdiction without the need for the police to obtain an order. The consultation period is due to finish on 13 May, following which legislative proposals will be drawn up for inclusion in the planned Justice Bill.

Sentencing Guidelines Council

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to consider the introduction of a Sentencing Guidelines Council.

(AQO 1109/10)

Minister of Justice: The Hillsborough Agreement proposed the inclusion of the establishment of a Sentencing Guidelines Council in the Department of Justice addendum to the Programme for Government. While sentencing in individual cases is, of course, a matter for the judiciary, I am currently examining all options on how best to promote public confidence in sentencing and will bring forward a consultation paper.

Victims of Crime

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to introduce a Charter of Rights for victims of crime.

(AQO 1113/10)

Minister of Justice: Improving services for victims of crime will be absolutely central to the work of my Department.

One of my first acts as Justice Minister was to go and see some of these services at first hand, by visiting Victim Support and the NSPCC at Laganside Court last Wednesday. I also met with my Irish counterpart, Dermot Ahern, at Stormont in my first week, together with PSNI Chief Constable Matt Baggott and Garda Commissioner, Fachtina Murphy. We had a very helpful and constructive discussion, which included victims issues.

I intend to bring forward a package of measures to improve services for victims of crime, which will be included in the addendum to the Programme for Government. This will include a new Code of Practice, which will address the rights and legitimate expectations of victims. In developing the new Code, I will be considering whether to place some or all of it on a statutory footing, as well as looking at what has been done in other jurisdictions. What we want to achieve is a new Code of Practice which best meets the needs of victims of crime in Northern Ireland, and I will be consulting widely to ensure this is what we produce.

Justice Ministers' Meeting

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Justice to outline the key issues discussed in his first meeting with the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr Dermot Ahern T.D.

(AQO 1115/10)

Minister of Justice: My Speaker, I welcomed the early opportunity of discussing a range of issues on cross border policing and justice cooperation including the success of the personnel exchange programme between PSNI and An Garda Síochána, which has resulted in 86 officers from both services benefitting from the programme. I also welcome the excellent relationship developed between both police services on organised crime.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to receive a briefing on the extent of progress on work streams being taken forward on public protection, management of sex offenders, youth justice and

forensic science. In particular, a number of positive initiatives have flowed from close cooperation including the development of an operational agreement between both police services that facilitates the exchange of information on sex offenders and consideration of ways to strengthen the requirements in existing legislation to increase public protection.

The meeting also provided an early opportunity to review cross border security cooperation with the Chief Constable and Garda Commissioner.

Permanent Secretary

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice whether and when his Department will advertise publicly for a Permanent Secretary.

(AQO 1116/10)

Minister of Justice: There are no plans to advertise publicly for a Permanent Secretary to the Department. With the written approval of the Civil Service Commissioners and in line with normal practice for machinery of government organisations, Nick Perry became the Permanent Secretary on devolution.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current draft of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

(AQO 1118/10)

Minister of Justice: I welcome the production of the draft as I believe the Shared Future Strategy is central to the success of the Executive. My Department is making a number of suggestions for the development of the strategy and I look forward to its early finalisation, following a thorough consultation process in which interested parties can contribute.

As Minister of Justice, I have a number of priority areas for a shared future. I want to engage communities and statutory agencies on how to develop greater shared space at interface areas and the options for moving beyond peacewalls while providing a safe environment for the communities affected. I also intend to promote legislation to introduce crime reduction partnerships, to create offences relating to sectarian conduct by spectators at sports events and to enhance work already being done on hate crime.

Department for Regional Development

Bypass Road for Dungannon

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposal for a bypass road for Dungannon.

(AQW 6112/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Road Service has advised that it is currently implementing the Investment Delivery Plan for Roads 2018, published in 2008. This plan did not include a bypass road for Dungannon as it was not considered to be a sufficiently high priority, when compared to other competing road improvement proposals.

Roads Service is currently preparing a Long Term Forward Planning (LTFP) schedule and a bypass/distributor road for Dungannon has been recommended for inclusion in this schedule. This LTFP schedule will be used in the preparation of future programmes and plans.

The New Dual Carriageway which Bypasses Newry

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to ensure the installation of effective road designation and numbering on the new dual carriageway which bypasses Newry.

(AQW 6185/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As with all major road improvement schemes, the dualling of the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue must go through a series of Statutory Processes, one of which is the Direction Order. The Direction Order covers changes to the trunk road network, as well as providing for sections of roads that are being stopped-up or abandoned.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Direction Order for the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue dual-carriageway was made on 19 December 2005, and came into operation on 6 February 2006. Subsequent planning and development of the scheme has included the road signage element. The information on this signage, which is in the process of being erected as part of the ongoing construction process, complies with the Direction Order.

NI Water: Consultancy

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much NI Water spent on consultancy between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2010; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of (a) which consultancy companies were used; (b) how much each company was paid; and (c) the service provided.

(AQW 6221/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that in responding to your question it has examined the definitions of external consultancy as laid out by the Department of Finance and Personnel and, in so far as it is able, has applied these accurately. On this basis external consultancy includes expenditure on work that is outside the normal ongoing business of NIW including:

- investigating problems;
- providing analysis;
- providing advice and assistance in decision making;
- assisting with the development of new systems, structures or new capabilities within the organisation; and
- it does not include work on the capital works programme.

External Consultancy spend, excluding VAT, for the three years to 31 March 2010 is as detailed below:

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
Achievers	0	495	0	Executive Coaching
Adjust Procurement Solutions Ltd	10,922	0	0	It Implementation/ Support
Alaris Consulting Ltd	0	25,850	70,293	Technology Upgrade/ Support
Alexander Hr Ltd	8,343	38,655	0	Human Resource Support/Advice

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
Alvarez & Marsal Europe Limited	10,934	70,642	0	Preparation, Delivery & Write Up Of The Niw Board Workshop To Develop The New Operating Model
Amt-Sybex	0	0	27,232	TechnoLogY Upgrade/Support
Anna Shiels	0	7,058	1,418	Press/Marketing Support
Appliance Technology Limited	0	21,178	5,600	It Implementation/Support
Ariba Inc	0	0	6,400	Procurement Process Upgrade/Support
Asidua Limited	0	373,432	216,928	It Implementation/Support
Av Browne - Advertising Ltd	0	3,780	0	Public Relations/Media Support
Bdo Stoy Hayward	31,475	0	0	Transformation Toolkit
Being Communication Limited	50,000	0	0	It Development/Support
Bespoke Performance Management Limited	35,574	130,198	108,594	It ImplementAtion/Support
Bill Mccrum Consulting	0	0	11,900	Benchmarking Analytical Services
Black & Veatch Ltd	22,383	35,097	0	Mandatory Regulation Reporter
Blue Print Appointments	31,601	0	0	Technology Upgrade/Support
Bravosolution Uk Limited	0	0	27,846	Procurement Process Upgrade/Support
Btw Shiells	8,500	15,700	11,025	Estate Management Advice & Asset Valuations
Business & Scientific Services Ltd	0	90,483	31,864	It Implementation/Support
Capita Business Services Ltd	13,195	9,847	0	Specialist Pension Administration

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
CHanging Chains Limited	0	62,811	0	Procurement Process Advice
Chubb Fire Limited	0	18,153	0	Ict Service Improvement
Cijm Partnership	0	130,455	7,250	Interim Management Support
CIn Solutions Ltd	0	167,612	114,043	Data Quality/ Business Operating Model
Construction Consultancy Services	51,190	104,288	97,604	Technology Upgrade/ Support
Consult Nb1 Limited	14,850	0	0	Organisation Rationalisation
Contracting Out Llp	222,599	182,464	257,385	Support In Relation To Pfi Projects/ Other Contract Advice
Cssp	0	37,571	24,577	Technology Upgrade/ Support
Deloitte & Touche	0	0	314,676	Financial Model Specification/ Board Review/ Data Quality Review For Customer Billing
Diligence Consultancy Ltd	0	0	10,817	Specialist Accident Simulation & Response Training
Doran Consultant	0	5,000	0	Water Industry Advice
Eim	0	49,618	0	Interim Management Support
Empathy Rating Syndicated Research - Uk Water Industry	4,200	7,120	0	Water Syndicate Measurement
Entec	0	14,670	0	Technology Upgrade/ Support
Ernst & Young Llp	79,838	29,977	352,956	SubjEct Matter Expert For Customer Hub/ Pc10 Support
Frontier Economics Ltd	66,753	98,354	95,011	Financial Model Development/Pc10 Support

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
Fujitsu Services Ltd	0	50,647	330,526	It Implementation/ Support
Glen Contracts	0	0	288,861	Technology Upgrade/ Support
Grontmij Ltd	0	28,756	7,286	Technology Upgrade/ Support
Halcrow Economics & Business Solutions	0	0	67,163	Mandatory Regulation Reporter
Hcl Communications	1,390	0	0	It Implementation/ Support
I B M United Kingdom Ltd	1,200	8,269	0	Ict Service Improvement
Ian M PARKER	0	0	9,900	Maintenance Of It Systems
Ics Consulting Ltd	0	29,831		Design And Implementation Of Asset Management Systems & Processes
Insidedge	45,000	0	0	Communications & Brand Support
Intapeople Ltd	5,880	0	0	Ict Service Improvement
Interim Management Assignments (Ni) Ltd	166,051	25,000	0	Interim Management Support
It Project Recovery Limited	54,322	167,015	124,359	Interim Management Support
John W Smith	23,759	19,531	2,875	Regulatory Advice
Katalis Limited	0	0	38,102	It Implementation/ Support
Macmillan Media	1,300	0	0	Public Relations/Media Support
Martin Cowley Media	0	26,320	0	Interim Management Support
Mercer Human Resource Consulting	88,268	35,399	26,756	Actuarial And Pensions Advice
Mott Macdonald Ltd	1,183,802	1,391,049	651,677	Support In Relation To Pfi Projects

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
Mwh Uk Ltd	1,017,419	1,837,632	2,778,371	Lead Partner For One Am Consortium Providing Design And Implementation Of Asset Management Systems. Support For Capital Efficiency Programmes, Development Of The Asset Management Plan (Regulatory REquirement), & Capital Programme For Pc10
Neueda	77,573	51,399	0	It Implementation/Support
North Time & Data Limited	17,500	0	0	Public Relations/Media Support
Northern Ireland Computing Ltd	0	5,514	30,265	It Implementation/Support
Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency	18,043	0	0	Human Resource Support/Advice
Northgate Info Solutions	0	0	53,400	Technology Upgrade/Support
Novosco	0	15,150	0	Ict Service Improvement
Ntuition Ltd	65,656	46,800	0	Interim Management Support
Ollave Ltd	33,375	23,794	24,660	Procurement Support Services
Oracle Corporation Uk Ltd	0	31,042	0	Technology Upgrade/Support
Orion Engineering Services Limited	30,852	26,315	28,760	Technology Upgrade/Support
Pathway Resourcing Ltd	0	32,585	0	Specialist Recruitment Advisors
Perceptive Insight Market Research Ltd	0	32,320	0	Technology Upgrade/Support
Peter J Graham Consultancy Ltd	20,213	0	0	Procurement Support Services

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
Practical Planning Limited	71,240	8,320	0	Management Consultancy
Pricewaterhouse Coopers Llp	6,204,949	3,350,931	2,813,166	Programme Management/ Recruitment Support/ Management Consultancy/ Financial & Regulatory Planning Advice
Prime Transformation Ltd	0	4,500	0	Executive Team Diagnostic Workshop
Rospa Enterprises Limited	17,025	19,580	2,231	Health & Safety Consultancy
Sacker & Partners	28,919	3,412	0	Specialist Legal Advice For Pensions
Service & System Solutions (Sx3) Ltd	6,000	0	0	Ict Service Improvement
Stakeholder Communications Ltd	690	35,785	8,925	Public Relations/Media Support
Sureskills	0	7,620	0	Ict Service Improvement
Symology Ltd	0	0	1,060	It Implementation/Support
Tes (Ni) Ltd	0	21,939	0	Technology Upgrade/Support
The Dp Group	0	6,750		Ict Service Support
The Event-Ful Consultancy Ltd	11,143	24,529	10,266	Public Relations/Media Support
The Sanzar Partnership	0	20,000	10,277	Technology Upgrade/Support
Third Level Ltd	0	0	86,392	Executive Coaching
University Of Ulster	0	0	2,640	N I Economic Outlook As Pertaining To Pc10
Vector Resourcing Ltd	0	181,791	191,000	Ict Service Support
Waterpeople Limited	13,575	14,400	0	SpeCialist Recruitment Advisers

	Year Ending 31 March 2008 £	Year Ending 31 March 2009 £	Year Ending 31 March 2010 £	Service Provided
Weber Shandwick	52,770	0	0	Communications & Brand Support
Wrc Plc	34,422	111,501	13,833	Technology Upgrade/Support
Total	9,954,692	9,425,934	9,396,168	

NI Water Contracts

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to list all contracts under investigation by NI Water; and (ii) to detail the reasons for undertaking each investigation.

(AQW 6224/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that an initial review by its internal audit team was commissioned by the Chief Executive in September 2009 to examine the appointment process used for a particular contractor known as 'Contracting Out LLP'. This review found that the contract had been awarded by means of a single tender action (STA). This contract had originally been approved by the former Chief Executive but the level of expenditure was such that it ought to have been approved by NIW's Board and by my Department. As a consequence, the current Chief Executive commissioned a wider Contracts Approval review by internal audit to ascertain whether this exception was a one-off or whether further instances of non compliance existed. This further review examined the contract award and approval process for all contracts recorded on NIW's Contracts Database. To confirm compliance from source transactions it also reviewed all suppliers with expenditure over £100k in the previous 12 months (i.e. from December 2008 to December 2009) and confirmed contract award and approval processes. Any non compliance issues found were reported in the subsequent Contracts Approval report. This report is available on the DRD website.

As there were a number of further significant non compliance issues found in the Contracts Approval review a further 'deep dive' review covering, as far as possible, all supplier arrangements not covered within the sample in the Contracts Approval review was commissioned immediately by the Chief Executive and DRD Permanent Secretary. This review examined all supplier arrangements with expenditure over £100k between 1 April 2007 and 22 January 2010 that were not already examined in the Contracts Approval review, to confirm whether contract award and approval processes were in accordance with the financial delegation and procurement requirements. In addition a sample of 10% of supplier arrangements with expenditure between £30 and £100k were selected for review. A number of similar further significant non compliance issues were found in this review and details of exceptions will be made publicly available in due course.

The 'deep dive' review also reviewed a sample of capital contracts under £500k from the Capital Works Program system to confirm the method of contract award and approval process. No instances of non-compliance with NIW's procurement rules were found during this review. Further, following allegations raised internally regarding 'invoice slicing' within a Meter Maintenance and Installations contract, an internal audit investigation was recently conducted. This investigation found no evidence of fraud. However, NIW is currently considering what further action may be necessary in light of the findings of the investigation.

In addition, as a result of a recent whistle-blowing report, NIW has been carrying out an investigation into the award process for contract C071 – Management of Technicians for Maintenance of Equipment in Fields of Instruments, Radio and Telemetry. There has been no evidence of impropriety found as a result of the investigation. Also, following concerns expressed to DRD by Cllr Lynch and Conwell Contracts Ltd regarding the re-running of a tendering process in 2008, for the Framework for Small Sewerage Schemes a preliminary investigation into the procurement and tendering process was

undertaken by my Department's Internal Audit Branch. The overall conclusion acknowledges that while the 2008 competition was re-run the reasons for doing so appeared reasonable and that there was no evidence that the competition was re-run to facilitate a competitor of Conwell Contracts.

Road Works

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the location; and (ii) the proposed timescale of any road works due to be carried out by Roads Service or NI Water in the North Down constituency in 2010/11.

(AQW 6226/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-searchall.htm>

Northern Ireland Water has advised that it does not hold details of capital infrastructure projects broken down by parliamentary constituency. However, in the financial year 2010/11 the following infrastructure projects, which will require road works, are believed to impact on the North Down area:-

Location	Timing *
Morston Park, Bangor - Flood Alleviation Scheme.	Spring/Summer 2010
Crawfordsburn Road, Bangor - Storm and foul sewer extensions.	Spring/Summer 2010
Gransha Road, Bangor - Trunk sewer replacement.	Spring/Summer 2010
Craigdarragh Road to Seahill Road -Sewer replacement.	Spring/Summer 2010
Bangor Drainage Area Plan Stage 1 (Details of roads involved not yet known).	Early 2011
Millisle Drainage Area Plan Stage 2 (Details of roads involved not yet known).	Early 2011

* The exact timescale for the works will be dependent on the outcome of the detailed scheme design and the contact procurement process.

Traffic Calming Schemes in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the traffic calming schemes (i) implemented since 2000; (ii) currently underway; and (iii) at the planning or consultation stage in the North Belfast constituency.

(AQW 6235/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service does not hold such data by parliamentary constituency area. However, details of traffic calming schemes completed from 2000 to May 2007 in the immediate constituency area, have been extracted from past Council Reports and are set out in the table below.

With regard to details of traffic calming schemes from May 2007 and the other information requested, I would refer the Member to my response to her recent Question (AQW 5633/10).

Traffic Calming Schemes implemented since 2000- May 2007	
Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Alexandra Park Avenue	Alexandra Park Avenue
Donegall Park Avenue	Donegall Park Avenue
Tennent Street Area	Tennent Street, Crimea Street, Snugville Street, Berlin Street, Carnan Street, Riga Street, Huss Row, Matchet Street, Upper Charleville Street, Ambleside Street, Sydney Street West, Cambrai Street, Ohio Street, Chief Street, Palmer Street, Rathlin Street, Fingal Street, Enfield Parade, Enfield Drive, Enfield Street, Enfield Gardens, Broom Street, Bray Street, Disraeli Street, Heather Street, Woodvale Street, Glenvale Street, Olive Street
Ardoyne Avenue	Ardoyne Avenue, Havana Way
Longlands Road	Longlands Road
Twaddell Avenue	Twaddell Avenue
Joanmount Area	Joanmount Gardens, Joanmount Park, Meyrick park, Prestwick Park, Marmount Gardens, Wallasey Park, Formby Park
Ballysillan Park Area	Ballysillan Park, Silverstream Road, Silverstream Crescent, Benview Park
Jamaica Street / Road	Jamaica Street, Jamaica Road
Atlantic Avenue	Atlantic Avenue, Oceanic Avenue
Glenbane Avenue, Rathcoole	Glenbane Avenue, Glenroy Terrace, Inisclairn Drive, Foyle Hill, Old Irish Highway, Kylemore Bend, Doonbeg Drive
Ligoniel Road	Ligoneil Road
Oldpark Avenue	Oldpark Avenue
Alliance, Glenbryn, Wheatfield Area	Alliance Road, Alliance Crescent, Alliance Gardens, Alliance Parade, Berwick Road, Hesketh Park, Hesketh Road, Glenbryn Drive, Glenbryn Gardens, Glenbryn Parade, Glenbryn Park, Wheatfield Drive and Wheatfield Gardens
Glandore Avenue	Glandore Avenue, Skegoneill Avenue
Lansdowne Road	Lansdowne Road, Lansdowne Park, Lowwood Park
Mountainhill Road	Mountainhill Road
Deerpark Road	Deerpark Road, Deerpark Drive, Clifondene Crescent, Clifondene Park
Ainsworth / Woodvale Area	Ainsworth Avenue, Ainsworth Drive, Ainsworth Pass, Ainsworth Street, Woodvale Avenue, Mayo Street, Mayo Link, Workman Avenue
Clifton Park Avenue	Clifton Park Avenue
Manor Street Area	Manor Street, Clifton Drive, Clifton Crescent, Harcourt Drive, Roseleigh Street
Grays Lane	Grays Lane
Fortwilliam Park	Fortwilliam Park
Serpentine Road	Serpentine Road, Glenhurst Gardens, Glenhurst Drive, Serpentine Gardens, Serpentine Parade, Voltaire Gardens, Vandyck Gardens, Veryan Gardens, Whitewell Crescent, Whitewell Drive, Whitewell Parade

Traffic Calming Schemes implemented since 2000- May 2007	
Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Brookvale / Cliftonville Area	Brookvale Street, Brookvale Avenue, Brookvale Drive, Brookhill Avenue, Cliftonville Avenue, Easton Crescent, Linden Gardens, Orient Gardens, Woodland Avenue, Allworthy Avenue
Highbury Gardens Area	Highbury Gardens, Holmdene Gardens, Strathroy Park, Northwick Drive, Eskdale Gardens, Stratford Gardens, Duneden Gardens, Ladbroke Drive
Henderson Avenue	Henderson Avenue
Salisbury Avenue / Hughenden Area	Salisbury Avenue, Old Cavehill Road , Chichester Road, Chichester Avenue, Chichester Park North, Chichester Park South, Chichester Park Central, Palace Gardens, Hughenden Avenue, Evelyn Gardens, Charnwood Avenue, Inver Avenue, Tokio Gardens, Tivoli Gardens, Victoria Gardens.
White City Area	Gunnell Hill, Ballyrone Hill, Thorburn Road, Merston Gardens
Kansas Avenue	Indiana Avenue, Madison Avenue , Kansas Avenue, Cedar Avenue, Hopefield Avenue, Willowbank Gardens, Rosemount Gardens.
Cavehill Road	Cavehill Road
Westland Road	Westland Road (from Old Park Road to Cardigan Drive)

NI Water Call-outs

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many requests NI Water received for call-outs to (a) domestic properties; and (b) non-domestic properties in each month since 1 April 2007; and (ii) how many of these call outs were met within the Service Level Agreement time of 24 hours. **(AQW 6252/10)**

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not hold records of callouts prior to November 2007 or split between domestic and non-domestic properties and is therefore unable to provide the full information requested. NIW received a total of 143,320 callouts between November 2007 and March 2010 and the monthly details are provided below.

Month	07/08	08/09	09/10
April	N/A	6,109	4,890
May	N/A	6,571	4,624
June	N/A	5,967	5,342
July	N/A	5,096	4,768
August	N/A	6,544	4,297
September	N/A	5,077	3,985
October	N/A	4,915	4,246
November	2,659	5,013	4,464
December	6,325	5,105	2,423
January	7,303	6,109	3,217
February	5,989	4,923	2,734

Month	07/08	08/09	09/10
March	5,994	5,312	3,319

N/A – Not available

NIW has given a commitment in its Codes of Practice to clear blockages in public sewers within 24 hours of it becoming aware of the problem. Over the past 6 months it has completed 97% of such blockages within this time.

Non-executive Directors of NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if the four non-executive directors of NI Water, who were recently dismissed, completed a Register of Interests form; (ii) whether any conflicts of interest arose during their tenure; and (iii) what action was taken in each case.

(AQW 6254/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that all interests declared by the four former non-executive directors were contained in a Board Register of Other Directorships/Interests. A conflict of interest arose in relation to the Board Chairman who also held a non-executive directorship with a company that NIW appointed to supply services by single tender action. This conflict of interest was managed by ensuring that the Chairman was not included in any decision making during the procurement process and had no influence in the selection of the contractor. The Chairman signed the business case for the single tender action following the appointment of the contractor.

Road Infrastructure in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to repair the road infrastructure in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.

(AQW 6267/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The Member will be aware, from my responses to previous Assembly Questions, that my Department's Roads Service carries out regular inspections of the road infrastructure in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, in accordance with its Road Maintenance Standards. During these inspections actionable defects are noted for repair in accordance with Roads Service's maintenance guidelines. The last inspection was carried out on 10 March 2010 and no defects were noted for repair.

Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to carry out any major works in the Beechfield Estate, at this time. However, Roads Service will continue to inspect the area, and any defects noted will be repaired in accordance with the road maintenance guidelines.

Lampposts and Kerb Stones

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what instructions his Department issued to Roads Service to ensure that public property, such as lampposts and kerb stones, are not used to convey messages of hate, sectarianism, bigotry and division by use of paint, flags or symbols.

(AQW 6310/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The problem of flag flying and graffiti, including the painting of kerbstones, is widespread across the North. It often leads to complaints from members of the public or elected representatives, particularly when the flag flying or painting is on main routes that are used by all of the community, or in residential areas, where it is claimed that most residents are opposed to the flag flying and/or painting.

My Department's Roads Service has signed up to the current multi-agency protocol with regard to the display of flags in public areas. This protocol aims to provide a pro-active approach, with the support of

communities and their representatives, to address the removal of flags from arterial routes and town centres and from particular locations, such as interface areas, or near schools, hospitals and churches.

The protocol recognises that an effective resolution to the flags issue is more likely to be achieved through the co-operation of local communities. Under the protocol, the Agency that is in the most effective position to consult, negotiate or resolve the situation, will take the lead. Roads Service will, when called upon by the lead Agency, provide the access equipment and resources to remove unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached that they should be taken down.

As I am sure you are aware, a review of "The Joint Protocol" was initiated by OFMDFM in April 2008 and I should stress that I have made my view clear, that the current procedures are outdated and need to be reviewed by all partner Agencies and Departments, including DSD, DOE, OFMDFM, DRD and the PSNI.

I can further advise that Roads Service would normally take action with situations that are considered to be a road safety issue, for example, painting on the face of road signs, or graffiti containing offensive language or messages. In addition, Roads Service would only be involved in assisting in the removal of graffiti where it is on road or footway surfaces, or on our equipment, such as street lighting cabinets. Roads Service has no powers in relation to graffiti on private property or buildings adjacent to the road, or on utility owned equipment within the road.

There are examples where Roads Service has already responded positively to help communities deal with graffiti and flags, where there is (near unanimous) local support for action within a community, and where the police are content that a Public Order issue will not arise.

Mains Water Supply

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what help and advice is available to ratepayers who are denied a mains water supply because the cost criteria cannot be met.

(AQW 6317/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is required under Article 76 of the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006 to provide a requisitioned water main for domestic purposes subject to certain conditions. One of the conditions, set out in Article 77, requires the persons making the requisition to pay the reasonable costs of providing the water main as determined in accordance with NIW's charges scheme. Under Regulation 7 of the Water and Sewerage Charges Scheme (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, NIW is empowered to provide an allowance against the cost of complying with a water main requisition and details are set out in its charges scheme.

My Department has provided additional assistance in respect of existing properties constructed before 1 January 2000 to make it more affordable for householders in rural areas to have their properties connected to the mains water supply. The assistance has raised the allowance from £6,500 to £10,000 per property from 1 April 2009. It is currently taking forward a review of 'financial assistance available for existing domestic properties not served by a watermain' and will be issuing a report which will be subject to public consultation during the Summer.

Investment in Infrastructure

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been invested in (i) water; and (ii) waste water, infrastructure in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6318/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the total investment in water and wastewater infrastructure in each of the last 5 years is as detailed in the table below:

Year	Water (£ million)	Wastewater (£ million)
2005/06	74	158
2006/07	76	123
2007/08	58	156
2008/09	68	164
2009/10	76	136

CAF Trains

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development when the new CAF trains will be available for use on passenger services by NI Railways.

(AQW 6330/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me it is currently planned that the first unit will enter passenger service in the latter half of 2011 with all units in passenger service by mid-2012.

Tree Cuttings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development why Roads Service did not place the tree cuttings on the landowner's property following the cutting down of trees at Kingarve Road, Dungannon on 19 December 2009, as outlined in current departmental policy.

(AQW 6340/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In my answer to the Member's recent Question (AQW 4463/10) I advised that when Roads Service personnel were cutting trees on the road verge of Kingarve Road on 19 December 2009, a number of trees in private ownership were inadvertently trimmed because of a misinterpretation of instructions. The Roads Service personnel were not instructed to place any tree cuttings on the landowners' land, as it was not intended that any trees in private ownership would be trimmed. All tree cuttings were taken to Roads Service's depot in Moygashel and shredded as advised in my previous reply.

Tree Cuttings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4463/10, to outline the total cost of cutting down the trees, given that the work was carried out on a Saturday and required the use of a privately-owned van and trailer.

(AQW 6341/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service advise that the cost of wages, staff travelling and plant hire for the tree cutting undertaken at Kingarve Road on 19 December 2009 was £190.50.

Annual Tree and Hedge Cutting Notice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service is exempt from the annual tree and hedge cutting notice which his Department publishes in the media.

(AQW 6342/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service publish the tree and hedge cutting notice annually to remind landowners of their responsibilities regarding roadside hedges and trees and to advise when hedges and trees should be cut. The notice advises landowners to avoid cutting hedges during the bird nesting season from mid-March until late August and also advises, where possible, that cutting should be undertaken from early February to mid-March. The notice states

it is not advisable to cut during Autumn and early Winter, as this removes berries and fruit which are an important source of food for wildlife.

Roads Service complies with the recommendations of the tree and hedge cutting notice, as far as is practical, without compromising road safety. I can advise that the majority of the trees which were cut on the Kingarve Road on 19 December 2009, were sycamore and do not have fruit during the winter period. I understand that the only trees trimmed on that day, which may have had fruit, were in private ownership and were cut as a result of a misunderstanding of the instructions provided.

Privately-owned Vehicles Used for Roads Service Work

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether all privately-owned vehicles used for Roads Service work have the appropriate industrial insurance cover and how this is verified by his Department.

(AQW 6343/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that all Roads Service staff who use their private vehicles for work, are required to have additional insurance cover, as is standard practice across all Government departments. As a result of the large number of civil servants requiring this type of insurance cover in the North, there are many insurance companies providing the appropriate cover at minimal additional cost and checks are undertaken to ensure that insurance policies meet the necessary requirements.

Free Travel on Public Transport

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of any steps being taken to integrate free travel on public transport for senior citizens throughout the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 6402/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Since April 2007 senior citizens resident in the north aged 65 and over, and those resident in the south aged 66 and over have been eligible for free travel on an all-island basis. There are currently no plans to introduce mutual recognition with concessionary schemes in Britain. However, officials from my Department, under the auspices of the British Irish Council, have held preliminary discussions with counterparts in the other seven administrations on the potential for mutual recognition of concessionary travel by older and disabled people.

Potholes on Abbot Drive, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5333/10 and AQW 6164/10, to confirm a date when repairs to the potholes on Abbot Drive, in the Bowtown Estate, Newtownards will be completed, particularly as vehicles continue to be damaged and residents injured due to the poor condition of the road.

(AQW 6445/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that all the potholes on Abbot Drive have now been repaired. This remedial action has been taken, pending the programmed resurfacing scheme, which is now scheduled to commence on 4 May 2010.

Department for Social Development

Social Housing Waiting List in South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 5932/10, to detail the social housing waiting list in South Belfast in terms of household type.

(AQW 6082/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The table below details the social housing waiting list in South Belfast in terms of household type at 31 December 2009 :-

Household Composition	Applicants
Singles	1,311
Small Adult Families	137
Small Families	396
Large Adults Households	18
Large Families	77
Elderly	300

Newbuild Social Housing Units

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many newbuild social housing units are planned for 2010/11 financial year in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area.

(AQW 6087/10)

Minister for Social Development: 91 newbuild social housing units are planned in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area in 2010/11.

Pension Advisory Offices for Ards and North Down

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many inquiries have been received by the Pension Advisory offices for Ards and North Down in the last three years.

(AQW 6155/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. Currently 20 Pension Advisers are geographically dispersed to cover Northern Ireland. While Pension Advisers are located in Jobs & Benefits/Social Security Offices across Northern Ireland they operate as a team and where workloads dictate they are re-directed from one location to another to ensure that all customers, irrespective of where they live receive a fast and efficient service. The total number of enquiries handled by Pension Advisers in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

Year	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Total Number of Pension Advisor Enquiries	7,660	6,692	8,078

Pension Advisory Office Staff

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of employing and running Pension Advisory office staff, including back room staff, for the Ards and North Down Areas over the last three years.

(AQW 6157/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. Currently 20 Pension Advisers are geographically dispersed covering Northern Ireland. While Pension Advisers are located in Job & Benefits/Social Security Offices across Northern Ireland they operate as a team and where workloads dictate they are re-directed from one location to another to ensure that all customers, irrespective of where they live receive a fast and efficient service. The total expenditure for the Pension Advisor service in each of the last three years is set in the table below.

Year	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Total Pension Advisor Service Expenditure	£708k	£695k	£781k

72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how the Housing Executive recently acquired 72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine; and to detail the cost, if a purchase took place.

(AQW 6160/10)

Minister for Social Development: The house at 72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine was purchased by the Housing Executive in February 2010 under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme. The purchase price would be deemed commercial in confidence and is a private matter between the owner and the Housing Executive.

72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development why the Housing Executive did not consider 72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine as housing stock.

(AQW 6161/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive do not place properties bought under the Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED) directly into its stock. This is because the SPED budget is separate from the Housing budget and funding for SPED cannot be used to supplement the Housing budget by taking properties into stock.

Urban Renewal Area Status

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if a decision and an announcement will be made on the Urban Renewal Area Status of the Upper Long Streets in the New Lodge and the Parkside and Glen areas before the 6 May 2010; and where and how such an announcement will be made.

(AQW 6169/10)

Minister for Social Development: Significant progress has been made in respect of planned redevelopment activity for the New Lodge, Parkside and Glen Areas of North Belfast.

I plan to make an announcement as soon as practicable although no time or format has yet been decided. I will advise the member accordingly in due course.

Funding for Debt Advice Services

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development if funding for Debt Advice Services will continue; and when the review into the impact of the current funding will be complete.

(AQW 6231/10)

Minister for Social Development: In May 2009, in the absence of sufficient funding to launch a full mortgage rescue scheme, I provided funding for the Housing Rights Service to launch the pilot Mortgage Debt Advice Service. The initial 12 month pilot evaluation, for the period up to 18 May 2010, is due to be completed during the summer. Indications are that this service has brought significant benefits, as a result, I intend to extend the service until March 2011 at the earliest.

Social Fund Funeral Payment

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consider extending the 'Just Cause' facility for late claims for Social Fund Funeral Payment.

(AQW 6234/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is no “Just Cause” facility for late claims for Social Fund Funeral Payments because the Funeral Payment rules are already very generous with claims accepted from the date of death up to 3 months following the date of the funeral. This allows for situations when funerals may be delayed. There are no plans to extend the time limit beyond 3 months.

South Belfast Regeneration Area

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development why the Housing Executive authorised costly renovation work in the South Belfast Regeneration Area despite the fact that this area has long been zoned for redevelopment.

(AQW 6247/10)

Minister for Social Development: No new applications for grant aid to homes in the redevelopment section of the Village have been approved since 30 April 2008, when an Urban Renewal Area was declared.

However 26 homes have had grant aided work totalling £95,836.51 completed within the last two years as these approvals pre-dated the declaration of the Urban Renewal Area and as such the Housing Executive was already committed to this work.

Warm Homes Plus

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if she would consider amending the eligibility criteria for Warm Homes Plus to include homes with sub-standard or outdated oil or gas central heating systems.

(AQW 6248/10)

Minister for Social Development: The new Warm Homes Scheme commenced on 1 July 2009 and I gave a commitment that a review of the scheme would take place after one year of operation. The review is scheduled to commence in July 2010.

Employment Support Allowance

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how the progress of the new Employment Support Allowance system has been monitored; and if any measures have been identified to improve the service.

(AQW 6249/10)

Minister for Social Development: The ESA Centre provides a weekly progress report to the Chief Executive of the Social Security Agency and to the Senior Management Board.

Since the launch of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), my officials have continued to review and where possible improve the Centre’s operating procedures. In addition, the Centre’s proactive engagement with stakeholder groups representing the most vulnerable customers has helped inform measures for the improvement of procedures.

The changes to date include:

- The introduction of safeguard visits for vulnerable customers,
- The provision of interim payments,
- free telephone calls to the claim line for mobile phone users,
- Revised telephony scripts,
- The payment of the contributory element of ESA claims first,
- Revised document handling procedures,
- The reduction in the number of customers waiting for their Work Capability Assessments and the time taken to be examined,
- Recent computer upgrades which now enable customers to claim for Housing Benefit as part of the telephone claim process.

These changes have contributed to the delivery of significant improvements to telephony answer rates which are now consistently above 90%, whilst the time taken to complete a claim to ESA by telephone has reduced to around 20-25 minutes.

Homeless People

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently deemed to be homeless and sleeping on the street.

(AQW 6292/10)

Minister for Social Development: On average there are fewer than 10 people on any given night in Belfast and Derry who are deemed to be homeless and sleeping on the streets. There are no reports of people being homeless and sleeping on the streets elsewhere.

Right to Buy Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to reduce the ceiling limit on the discount under the Right to Buy scheme.

(AQW 6299/10)

Minister for Social Development: My officials are currently examining the operation of the House Sales Scheme. I have no plans, at present, to make any amendments to the Scheme.

Welcome Organisation

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to increase funding for the Welcome organisation.

(AQW 6325/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are no plans to increase funding to the Welcome Organisation during 2010/11.

Sharing and Integration

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her work in promoting sharing and integration.

(AQO 1080/10)

Minister for Social Development: Within my own Department, I have already ensured that much of the work includes measures designed to achieve an inclusive society where people can live and socialise together. In housing, I have introduced the screening of every new build scheme that comes forward on the Social Housing Development Programme to explore its potential for inclusion as a Shared Future Development and established the Shared Neighbourhood Programme. In regeneration, I have ensured that my Department's masterplans and physical development programmes are developed in ways that ensure all the sections of the community have access to shared spaces for work and leisure. While in community development, I have provided support to those voluntary and community groups that promote the vision of a shared future and are actively working towards ending sectarianism and division.

However, while these examples illustrate the wealth of work that has been undertaken over the past three years, I am aware that my Department alone cannot achieve the level of sharing and integration needed to sustain social and economic prosperity for the people of Northern Ireland. I therefore look forward to working closely with my Executive colleagues in the near future to progress these issues.

Housing Improvement Schemes: Mid Ulster

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive improvement schemes are planned for the Mid-Ulster constituency in 2010/11.

(AQO 1081/10)

Minister for Social Development: Whilst the Housing Executive are still finalising the allocation of their budget for the year ahead, they have provisionally identified a kitchen replacement scheme in Mid Ulster which they expect to start this year. This scheme would be delivered to 71 homes in the Brown Street and Edmund Street areas of Magherafelt and once details are confirmed, the Housing Executive will write to tenants directly.

Social Housing

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the impact of resourcing and funding pressures on the targets for new-build social housing.

(AQO 1084/10)

Minister for Social Development: There can be nobody in this Chamber this afternoon who by now is not aware of the shortfall the housing budget suffered as a result of the collapse of the land and property market. With so much of my budget predicated on land and property sales, it was inevitable that the downturn in the market would have a more savage impact on housing than perhaps elsewhere.

My budget has already suffered losses of up to £200m in the last few years and this year I have been asked to find further savings of £30m.

I would like to see the housing budget placed on a more firm financial footing. I have made that case to my Executive colleagues and will continue to do so. However despite the well documented budgetary problems, we have still managed to work something of an economic miracle.

I am proud that last year we delivered the largest number of new homes for a decade. The 1838 starts was well ahead of the 1750 target. Having delivered so much last year, I have set the bar even higher for next year.

Castlecourt Centre, Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development if she has had any discussions with the owners of CastleCourt regarding the redevelopment of the complex and surrounding area; and the outcome of those discussions.

(AQO 1085/10)

Minister for Social Development: My officials and I have had several meetings with Westfield since 2006, when Royal Exchange was selected as the next major, retail-led, comprehensive development scheme for the city centre. These discussions are ongoing.

US Visit

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the work carried out during her recent visit to the United States.

(AQO 1086/10)

Minister for Social Development: I visited the United States to take forward my Shared Future Agenda by further developing useful contacts and to identify models of work that might help in the wider work of my department. I also utilised this opportunity to establish and renew a number of important relationships relevant to my portfolio with U S government agencies and Non-Governmental organisations.

I shared key messages about our achievements and our challenges. I explained how we have achieved a political settlement that has replaced conflict and violence with democratic political debate. I also explained that we continue to face huge challenges with particular regard to our divided community and outlined my commitment to achieving a Shared Future.

I was honoured to be asked to speak at the annual Garda McCabe Fellowship Breakfast at the John Jay Criminal Justice College in New York. The programme provides funds for an academic exchange programme that promotes the sharing of practices and technologies in policing and criminal justice

between Ireland and the USA. This is a very positive example of collaborative work that has emerged from our violent past that I was delighted to support.

Along with my Executive colleagues I was also honoured to be able to attend and speak at the Northern Ireland Bureau St Patrick's Day Breakfast that focused this year on a video presentation of our Five Tourism Signature Projects. It will be no surprise to members that I was particularly supportive of our efforts to promote the St Patrick's Christian Heritage project and the particular attractions of my own South Down constituency.

Dungiven: Regeneration

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total amount spent by her Department in the last 10 years on all forms of regeneration in Dungiven.

(AQO 1087/10)

Minister for Social Development: As Dungiven is not defined as an urban settlement by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, DSD does not have a role in its regeneration as we focus solely on regeneration of urban areas. Dungiven has a population of approximately 3,000 and is therefore defined as rural. Responsibility for the regeneration of rural areas lies with the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development.

European Investment Bank Funding

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister for Social Development how she will use the £30m funding from the European Investment Bank.

(AQO 1088/10)

Minister for Social Development: This record investment from the European Investment Bank will complement the funding already made by my Department to Housing Associations and will support the delivery of 820 new homes in 26 different schemes across Northern Ireland.

Winter Fuel Payment

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she has taken to lobby the Minister for Work and Pensions to have the Winter Fuel Payment extended to people suffering from chronic illnesses.

(AQO 1089/10)

Minister for Social Development: I recognise that people suffering from chronic illness can face extra costs as a result of their condition and have written to Jim Knight, Minister of State for Employment and Welfare in the Department for Work and Pensions, asking him to consider extending eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment to include those people who are suffering from a serious life-limiting illness or disability.

Community Regeneration: Funding

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what is the potential reduction in funding available for community regeneration following the 2009/10 budgetary cuts.

(AQO 1090/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is required to identify an additional £1.6m in efficiency savings for 2010-11 against urban and regeneration activities. My Department intends to protect priority front line delivery programmes.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

NAAFI Tea Products

Mr A Bresland asked the Assembly Commission whether it will consider making the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes brand of tea available in the catering facilities and the shop in Parliament Buildings.
(AQW 6184/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): Our Catering Facilities and Shop are contracted out to Eurest who selects approved suppliers to source all goods and produces for the purpose of the contract. Eurest regularly reviews its procurement policies and have produced a series of policies addressing Sustainable Procurement. These cover their supply chain partnerships: including supporting local suppliers, free range and organic produce, reducing food miles and environmental aspects.

This, as well as ensuring value for money and adhering to Health & Safety laws, must comply with our contract specifications 2.13 Social Issues:

“The Contractor will be required to develop, in consultation with the Assembly’s representative, a sustainable food procurement policy.

The Assembly is committed to the principle of Fairtrade and wishes the Contractor to use his best endeavours to procure supplies carrying the Fairtrade mark for use in the Assembly’s premises.

The use of local produce should also be considerable. Where appropriate or possible the Contractor should use products that are environmentally friendly and that have been recycled or organically produced.”

The Assembly has contacted Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh National Assembly who confirmed that they do not have NAAFI break tea available in their premises.

Further to the press release of 9th April 2010 the Assembly also contacted NAAFI via their PR office who confirmed that their break tea is neither fair-trade nor available outside the designated 80 Spar stores in the North West of England at present.

Therefore in line with our contract specifications and the unavailability of the products NAAFI break tea can not be considered at this time.

The Assembly Commission would be happy to review this in the future, should NAAFI tea products become available and sold under the fair-trade banner.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 7 May 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Maze Project

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the consultation and development bodies that have been constituted since the beginning of the Maze project; and to detail the cost of each of these bodies to date.

(AQW 4824/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Two consultation and development bodies were established to assist with the redevelopment of Maze/Long Kesh. The cross-party Maze/Long Kesh Consultation Panel was set up in 2003 to help bring forward proposals for the redevelopment of the site. The cost of this body was £104,126. Subsequently the Maze/Long Kesh Monitoring Group was created to oversee the proposed development of the site. The cost of this Group was £2,804. It was dissolved in 2007 following devolution.

Maze Development Corporation

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Maze Development Corporation has a target date for its first report.

(AQW 4826/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation has not yet been formed therefore a target date for a first report has not been determined.

Maze/Long Kesh Delivery Unit

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost, to date, of the Maze/Long Kesh Delivery Unit's activities.

(AQW 4827/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Maze Long/Kesh Programme Delivery Unit was formed in April 2008. Costs for the Delivery Unit for the financial year 2008/09 were £518,920 and to date for this financial year are £328,986. These include management of the Maze/Long Kesh redevelopment programme, Central Procurement Directorate costs, planning ongoing regeneration work and land assembly.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Incidences of Brucellosis and Tuberculosis

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department is on track to meet the Programme for Government target to reduce the incidence of (i) brucellosis by 20%; and (ii) tuberculosis by 27%, by 2011.

(AQW 6314/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): In relation to brucellosis, we have made outstanding and consistent progress given there has been a 60% reduction currently in disease to date compared to the target of 20% by 2011.

A 27% reduction in TB incidence, would require the incidence of TB in herds to be reduced to 3.90% by 31 March 2011. The current incidence is 5.54% (to the end of February 2010) and although bovine TB is a disease subject to fluctuations in incidence, it is unlikely this aspect of target will now be met. This is particularly the case as changes in the programme necessary to achieve EU agreement to an EU NI TB Eradication Plan 2010 - and thus a share of the 10 million Euros EU funding allocated to England, Wales and the north of Ireland for TB eradication - will result in the re-classification of animals as reactors that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test. The initial effect of this is expected to be an increase in the incidence of TB.

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance is available from her Department for farmers and landowners when completing application forms for the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 6404/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Single Application Forms (SAFs) are issued in late March each year to all farm businesses that submitted an application in the previous year. To assist farmers, the SAF is pre-populated with the identity details for the farm business, the number and value of entitlements held by the business and details of each field parcel declared on the previous year's application.

Guidance material detailing any changes to the application process, scheme rules and on how to complete the form is provided in the application pack. In addition, a booklet setting out the rules of the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme is available on request from DARD Direct offices and also on the Department's website. This guidance material includes contact details for DARD Direct offices and Single Farm Payment Branch, Orchard House.

DARD Direct staff are available during normal office hours from Monday to Friday to provide advice about completing the Single Application Form. Whilst these staff are not able to complete the form itself nor make technical decisions on behalf of the farmer, they carry out a quick visual check for obvious errors and omissions. In addition, some help is available to measure ineligible areas on farm maps

If farmers want to use the services of a form filler, a list of form fillers is available in each of the DARD Direct offices. Each year, following the introduction of SFP in 2005, SFP Branch has provided briefing for form fillers on the application process. In addition to these form filler sessions, in April 2010, Countryside Management Unit invited all new Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) and Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) participants to workshops in Ballymoney, Omagh, Enniskillen and Banbridge. Those attending these events (112 people) received advice about how to make a claim for the new CMS and OFS on the SAF using information in their scheme schedule. All those who attended were given a set of notes to take away with them.

Farm businesses have the option of submitting their application online. The online service, which is available around the clock, instantly verifies many aspects of the claim thus avoiding simple errors which could cause delays at a later stage

Enhancement of Bogs and Peatlands

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with farmers, landowners and other Departments concerning the retention and enhancement of bogs and peatlands.

(AQW 6443/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has regular contact with farmers, landowners and other Departments concerning the retention and enhancement of bogs and peatlands.

Retention of Bogs and Peatlands

All farmers and landowners claiming Single Farm Payment are subject to Cross-Compliance rules and must maintain their land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). Under GAEC measure 6 - the Protection of Habitats, all semi natural habitats such as bogs and peatlands must be retained.

Enhancement of Bogs and Peatlands

DARD's agri-environment schemes provide funding for farmers and landowners to positively manage and enhance farm habitats including lowland raised bogs and peatlands within heather moorland habitats. These voluntary schemes include measures such as controlled grazing, bracken and scrub control. Currently there are over 5,100 ha of lowland raised bog and over 54,500 ha of heather moorland being managed under these schemes.

Contact with other Departments

All DARD agri-environment scheme applicants with land within Designated Sites (Natura 2000 and Areas of Special Scientific Interest) are referred to DOE's NI Environment Agency (NIEA) for comment and advice before the final approval of the management details in the agri-environment scheme agreement.

Wild Mussel Fishery at Copeland Sound, Donaghadee

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to ensure that fishermen can develop the wild mussel fishery at Copeland Sound, Donaghadee.
(AQW 6462/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have decided that the mussel resource at Donaghadee Sound shall continue to be shared between those fishing for seed and wild mussels. There is therefore still an opportunity for the wild mussel fishermen to develop a fishery.

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Single Farm Payment applications were granted after going through an appeal process in each constituency, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6560/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am unable to provide the information you have requested by constituency. My Department does not hold information relating to SFP applications by constituency. I am able to provide the information by post code.

My Department has a two stage process for reviewing decisions relating to Single Farm Payment applications. Following a review decisions either remain unchanged or are changed. The table attached sets out by year and post code those cases where following a review my Department's original decision was changed.

Annex A

Single Farm Payment Review of Decisions (Appeal) cases that resulted in a change to DARD's original decision.

Year	Post Code	Number Cases resulting in a changed decision
1 May 2007 – 30 April 2008	BT14	1
	BT23	1
	BT25	1
	BT29	2
	BT30	1
	BT31	1
	BT32	2
	BT34	4
	BT35	2
	BT39	3
	BT41	1
	BT42	1
	BT45	4
	BT46	1
	BT47	5
	BT51	1
	BT54	3
	BT62	1
	BT63	1
	BT67	2
	BT70	2
	BT71	1
	BT75	1
	BT76	1
	BT79	9
	BT80	2
	BT81	2
	BT92	2
	BT93	2
	TD5 (Scotland)	1
	Total	61

Year	Post Code	Number Cases resulting in a changed decision
1 May 2008 – 30 April 2009	BT24	1
	BT25	1
	BT34	1
	BT42	1
	BT43	1
	BT44	4
	BT45	2
	BT47	2
	BT51	2
	BT53	1
	BT69	1
	BT70	2
	BT74	1
	BT75	1
	BT76	1
	BT78	2
	BT79	4
	BT80	1
	BT92	3
	BT93	1
	Total	33

Year	Post Code	Number Cases resulting in a changed decision
1 May 2009 – 30 April 2010	BT18	3
	BT20	1
	BT24	1
	BT25	2
	BT28	1
	BT29	2
	BT34	3
	BT35	1
	BT42	2
	BT43	1
	BT45	1
	BT47	3
	BT51	1
	BT52	2
	BT53	5
	BT54	5
	BT66	1
	BT71	1
	BT74	1
	BT75	1
	BT78	2
	BT79	1
	BT92	2
	Total	43

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Non-commissioned Works of Art

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial contribution his Department has made towards the cost of purchasing non-commissioned works of art, broken down by (i) the institution making the purchase; (ii) the work of art; (iii) the amount contributed; and (iv) the date of purchase, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 6347/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The Department does not fund organisations directly, but rather funding is disbursed through its arms length bodies, in this case the Arts Council, National Museums and Northern Ireland Museums Council.

Table 1 lists purchases made by the Arts Council and table 2 lists purchases by National Museums.

Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) operates a specimen purchase scheme for non-national museums and table 3 details these purchases. The definition of these pieces as ‘works of art’ is open to interpretation. The table shows the Council’s contribution to the purchase but not necessarily the whole cost and the date of purchase is not included as the actual purchase would have been made by the museum, not NIMC.

TABLE 1 - ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND COLLECTION

There were no works purchased by the Arts Council between 2000 and 2003.

Year	Title	Purchase Price	Payment Date
2003/04	Night Fall #1	£2,200.00	19/12/2003
	Eventide	£3,510.00	13/01/2004
	Return to Choco Island	£2,250.00	13/01/2004
	Forever Painting - The Morning #20	£1,900.00	13/01/2004
	Forever Painting - The Morning #23	£1,900.00	13/01/2004
	Pays de Mont Blanc	£3,100.00	13/01/2004
	Untitled Blue Painting	£3,000.00	13/01/2004
	Untitled Red Painting	£3,000.00	13/01/2004
	Untitled 2003	£2,100.00	12/02/2004
	Glimpsed Head I, II and III	£1,500.00	12/02/2004
	Untitled 2001	£600.00	12/02/2004
	The Virgin	£1,500.00	12/02/2004
	Trodden Underfoot	£350.00	23/03/2004
	Prussian Mist	£985.00	23/03/2004
	Hood	£900.00	23/03/2004
	Still 1a	£2,000.00	23/03/2004
	Seducere “Figure No 11”	£400.00	23/03/2004
	Enfold	£1,000.00	23/03/2004
	Lough Belshade	£2,400.00	23/03/2004
	Neelamoongil I	£495.00	23/03/2004
		£35,090.00	
2004/05	Untitled, Monoprint	£400.00	09/06/2004
	Foundation	£345.00	09/06/2004
	Stairwell	£3,800.00	16/06/2004
	I Hear Dogs Barking	£1,200.00	21/06/2004
	Extracts from a File	£6,072.21	21/06/2004
	Coat	£300.00	21/06/2004

Year	Title	Purchase Price	Payment Date
	W5 Large Window	£450.00	21/06/2004
	W5 Small Window	£450.00	21/06/2004
	Horizon 2002	£3,867.50	21/06/2004
	Untitled No 3	£1,000.00	21/06/2004
	Digital Prints x4	£1,660.00	23/06/2004
	Corridors of Power - A Prison	£200.00	23/06/2004
	Corridors of Power - Castlereagh	£200.00	23/06/2004
	Corridors of Power - Stormont	£200.00	23/06/2004
	Some of my Friends	£1,900.00	05/08/2004
	01CIRC/OR03 No1	£1,100.00	08/09/2004
	Landscape 2	£2,250.00	21/10/2004
	Self Portrait	£1,200.00	14/12/2004
	Manhattan	£2,500.00	14/12/2004
	Flooded Quay	£1,200.00	14/12/2004
	Lecale Coast	£1,200.00	14/12/2004
	Muck Spreader x 2	£250.00	14/12/2004
	Drawings x 2	£200.00	14/12/2004
	Pouring Vessel - Long Pipe	£200.00	14/12/2004
	Pouring Vessel - Vegetable Cutter	£200.00	14/12/2004
	Pouring Vessel - Teapot	£150.00	14/12/2004
	Pouring Vessel	£150.00	14/12/2004
	Pouring Vessel - Jackfield & Crows	£175.00	14/12/2004
	A Space Between 4	£1,250.00	14/12/2004
	Close to Home 8	£1,250.00	14/12/2004
	Interior	£2,850.00	20/12/2004
	Stereoscope x 3	£1,500.00	18/01/2005
	Flowers and Feathers	£3,200.00	07/03/2005
	Seed and Shadow	£2,497.33	07/03/2005
	Slice Painting in Prussian Blue 2004	£800.00	16/03/2005
		£46,167.04	

Year	Title	Purchase Price	Payment Date
2005/06	Loves Schemes and Echoes	£2,200.00	31/03/2004
	Venice related Cups and Saucers.	£600.00	07/03/2005
	Towards a Newer Laocoon	£1,550.00	31/03/2005
	Belfast Landscape: St Anne's from River House	£6,250.00	20/05/2005
	Time Lost from Home	£415.00	06/09/2005
	Nude with Palm Tree	£850.00	28/09/2005
	Untitled 1	£400.00	28/09/2005
	Untitled 2	£400.00	28/09/2005
	The Bathers	£1,600.00	29/11/2005
	Set of Venice Biennale related works	£5,000.00	24/03/2006
	Growing reflection	£3,500.00	31/03/2006
	Gathered lava	£1,350.00	31/03/2006
	Silver teapot with Lava knob	£2,995.00	31/03/2006
	Silver teapot with long handle	£1,500.00	31/03/2006
	Running wild	£340.00	31/03/2006
	Prickly Trio	£220.00	31/03/2006
		£29,170.00	
2006/07	Untitled	£3,500.00	11/04/2006
	In control (Head 1)	£395.00	13/06/2006
	Absorbed (Head 2)	£395.00	13/06/2006
	Wistful (Head 3)	£395.00	13/06/2006
	The Mercy Seat	£1,250.00	27/06/2006
	Doubting Blue	£525.00	17/07/2006
	Invisible Distance	£525.00	17/07/2006
	Meadow	£4,000.00	13/11/2006
	The Substitute Window	£4,500.00	13/11/2006
	The Emigrant	£3,500.00	13/11/2006
	Rhythm 1	£900.00	13/11/2006
	Rhythm 2	£900.00	13/11/2006
	American Express	£550.00	27/11/2006
	Yellow Helicopter	£1,200.00	27/03/2007
		£22,535.00	

Year	Title	Purchase Price	Payment Date
2007/08	A Tiger from Socci	£3,500.00	18/04/2007
	Disclaimer	£4,000.00	26/06/2007
	No Parking	£250.00	20/07/2007
	Fan	£250.00	20/07/2007
	James Street	£250.00	20/07/2007
	Harris Street	£250.00	20/07/2007
	Pigeon Holes	£400.00	18/07/2007
	I Love You. I Don't Know Why But I Do	£300.00	12/12/2007
	Cyber Baby	£190.00	09/01/2008
	Implements	£142.00	09/01/2008
	Experiment	£95.00	09/01/2008
	A Necessary Absence (A Study)	£1,900.00	09/01/2008
	Out of Time	£285.00	09/01/2008
	Radiant	£285.00	09/01/2008
	Man Outside the Pub	£1,800.00	07/01/2008
	Untitled 2006	£375.00	07/01/2008
	Altered Horizons I	£1,250.00	09/01/2008
	A Hundred Days	£340.00	20/03/2008
	Drinking the Waters	£650.00	25/01/2008
	Untitled	£300.00	11/01/2008
	R21. NW Watchtower	£2,849.38	05/02/2008
	Mannish Boy V - Policeman	£4,200.00	20/03/2008
	5 Euro Mannish Boy I - Priest	£260.00	20/03/2008
	5 Euro Mannish Boy VI - Undertaker	£260.00	20/03/2008
	School Protest	£720.00	20/03/2008
	Aerobatics	£450.00	20/03/2008
	Blue & White China	£350.00	20/03/2008
	Uccello of the Potato Field I & II	£300.00	20/03/2008
	Interruption II	£3,500.00	20/03/2008
	Untitled	£1,500.00	22/04/2008
		£31,201.38	
2008/09	Market Street, Derry	£4,500.00	10/06/2008
	Analytical Expression No.1	£1,200.00	17/07/2008

Year	Title	Purchase Price	Payment Date
	Innocent Chaos Collection - Split Personalities	£900.00	25/07/2008
	Untitled	£5,500.00	05/08/2008
	Green JCB Bucket with three holes	£1,450.00	29/01/2009
	Neil Shawcross's Studio Space	£220.00	29/01/2009
	Case Studies	£350.00	29/01/2009
	bell(a) exchange	£2,000.00	29/01/2009
	Collection	£2,500.00	29/01/2009
	Earl of Leicester	£900.00	29/01/2009
	City Hall, Belfast	£995.00	29/01/2009
	Potential	£330.00	06/03/2009
	Mew Island	£636.82	10/03/2009
	Systematisation Series	£570.00	18/03/2009
	Untitled Blur (Behold now is the day of our salvation.)	£400.00	18/03/2009
	Untitled Blur (Be still and know that I am God.)	£400.00	18/03/2009
	Margo	£850.00	05/05/2009 (accrual)
	Robert	£850.00	05/05/2009 (accrual)
	Elsy	£850.00	05/05/2009 (accrual)
	Dr Tim McNerny	£850.00	05/05/2009 (accrual)
		£26,251.82	
2009/10	Exterior-Interior	£1,600.00	05/05/2009
	Cairn Vessel # 0109b	£2,695.00	04/08/2009
	Cairn Vessel # 0209a	£2,395.00	04/08/2009
	Bag Men	£455.00	04/08/2009
	Erupt	£800.00	04/08/2009
	Wood at Mostnica Gorge, Slovenia	£855.00	15/12/2009
	Michael Longley	£1,425.00	15/12/2009
	Sleeping Girl	£2,850.00	15/12/2009
	Untitled	£325.00	20/01/2010
	Three Exhibition Rings	£2,300.00	09/02/2010
	Walker's Monument	£800.00	20/01/2010
	The Map of Watchful Architecture	£300.00	20/01/2010
	Falling for Grandeur Found Fabric	£3,300.00	20/01/2010

Year	Title	Purchase Price	Payment Date
	Capella Head Point	£650.00	20/01/2010
	Flower	£650.00	21/04/2010
	Chop	£650.00	21/04/2010
	Not Gun	£650.00	19/03/2010
	No Use Crying	£400.00	20/01/2010
	No Use Crying	£400.00	20/01/2010
	Here and There	£1,800.00	20/04/2010
	Return of the Native (A Source of Light)	£5,000.00	09/02/2010
	F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N	£7,000.00	Pending
		£37,300.00	
	Total	£227,715.24	

TABLE 2 – NATIONAL MUSEUMS

Work	Date of Purchase	Amount and Source of Funding		
		National Museums	Other	Total
Painting by Ernest Hayes, Storm Seas, Irish Coast (1963)	21/12/2000	IR£4,000	Friends of National Collections of Ireland IR£4,000	IR£8,000
Sculpture by Philip Flanagan, Ash Wood on Water, bronze , glass and wood	10/04/2001	£7,500	—	£7,500
Painting by Salomon Van Ruysdael (1600-70), River Landscape with Figures in Boats and Church in the Distance (1644)	14/06/2002	£15,000	Heritage Lottery Fund, National Art Collections Fund Esmé Mitchell Trust £415,500	£430,500
Painting by Rita Duffy, Titanic, mixed medial (oil, wax, lead) on panel (2002)	11/09/2002	£1,300	—	£1,300

Work	Date of Purchase	Amount and Source of Funding		
		National Museums	Other	Total
Painting by Hughie O'Donoghue, Wrestlers (2000-2)	21/12/2004	£23,000	National Art Collections Fund £25,000 Esmé Mitchell Trust £1,000	£49,000
Painting by John Breakey, The Sea is the Sea (2004)	21/01/2005	£2,475	—	£2,475
Forty plexiglass and laminated cibachrome prints on aluminium by Willie Doherty, Apparatus	08/02/2007	£10,000	The Art Fund £35,000	£45,000
Video installation by Willie Doherty, Ghost Story (2007)	21/04/2008	£29,060	Esmé Mitchell Trust £7,500	£36,560
Painting by Thomas Hickey (1741-1824), George, 1st Earl Macartney (1737-1806)	19/03/2009	£14,000	—	£14,000
Watercolour by John Nixon, A Friday Market in Belfast (1809)	19/03/2009	£5,500	—	£5,500
Painting by Elizabeth Magill, Chronicle of Orange (2007)	19/03/2009	£20,000	—	£20,000
Painting by Lindy Guinness (Belinda Guinness, Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava), Rt. Hon. The Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley, MP, MLA (b. 1926)	1/03/2010	£3,250	—	£3,250
Video/sound installation by Bill Fontana, Silent Echoes (2008)	20/03/2010	£15,000	—	£15,000

TABLE 3- NORTHERN IRELAND MUSEUMS COUNCIL – SPECIMEN PURCHASE SCHEME

Year	Museum	Object	Grant Claimed
2000-01	Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	Irish silver tankard	£3,000
	Down County Museum	Oil painting after Kneller	£1,000
	Down County Museum	Three rent books	£400

Year	Museum	Object	Grant Claimed
	Fermanagh County Museum	Farmers Club medallion	£240
	Downpatrick Railway Museum	Transportation of passenger brake carriage	£794.50
	Downpatrick Railway Museum	Transportation of R3 Railbus	£519
	Down County Museum	Watercolour by J.W.Carey	£1,250
	Fermanagh County Museum	William VI Irish tablespoon	£225
	Total		£7,428.50

THE SPECIMEN PURCHASE GRANTS SCHEME WAS SUSPENDED IN 2001-02 DUE TO BUDGETARY PRESSURES

Year	Museum	Object	Grant Claimed
2002-03	Fermanagh County Museum	Three copper plates used in Belleck Pottery	£500
	Lisburn Museum	Victorian Bog Oak Prayer Chair	£2,090.31
	Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum, Armagh	1840's brass hilted sword etched	£125
	Carrickfergus Town Museum	Painting of Annie Crossfield of Barrow ship by Reuben Chappel of Goole	£350
	Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Museum	WW11 medals	£350
	Harbour Museum	Hugh Thomson drawing	£250
	Larne Museum	Model of Princess Victoria	£1,000
	Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Museum	Military General Service Medal	£3,000
	Total		£7,665.31
2003-04	Larne Museum	Shell case gong, 1918	£125
	Down County Museum	Watercolour and framed addresses	£198.33
	Coleraine Museum	Three NI Railway posters	£1,125
	Carrickfergus Museum	Two volumes previously owned by Richard Kane	£750

Year	Museum	Object	Grant Claimed
	Coleraine Museum	Hugh Thompson archive	£5,000
	Total		£7,198.33
2004-05	Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Museum	Three metals awarded to Colour Sergeant Taylor	£750
	Gray Printers Museum	Banner of the Irish Volunteers	£1000
	Somme Heritage Centre	Five WWI artefacts	£850
	Ballycastle Museum	Seven paintings by Andrew Nicholl and John Nixon	£2,000
	Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum	Medals awarded to CSM Robert Neville	£1,000
	Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	Two pamphlets on the Ulster linen industry	£450
	Carrickfergus Museum	Northern Ireland International Football cap belonging to Bill McCullough	£350
	Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum	First series ordnance survey atlas of County Down	£1,375
	Fermanagh County Museum	Painting by Janet Pierce	£669.38
	Total		£8,138.76
2005-06	Royal Irish Fusiliers Museums	Linehan Medal	£65
	Royal Irish Fusiliers Museums	Carroll Medal	£85
	Lisburn Museum	Two books and two manuscripts	£563
	Fermanagh County Museum	Belleek Pottery items	£2,000
	Carrickfergus Museum	Kane Bible	£375
	Larne Museum	Illuminated Address	£280
	Down County Museum	Portrait of Neil Shawcross by Raymond Piper	£1,000
	Total		£4,368
2006-07	Down County Museum	Home Rule and Internment artefacts	£700.00

Year	Museum	Object	Grant Claimed
	National Trust – Florence Court	Five volumes from Enniskillen library	£750.00
	Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum	23 WWI Regimental postcards	£125.00
	The Inniskillings Museum	2 Korean War medals	£400.00
	Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	18th century lady's linen waistcoat	£500.00
	The Inniskillings Museum	O'Brien-Twohig medals	£1,000
	Fermanagh County Museum	'Whithorn' by William Scott – screen printed linen	£600.00
	Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	Manuscript history of Hillsborough	£2,000
	Coleraine Museum	18th century folio collection of Dr Adam Clarke	£500.00
	Coleraine Museum	Collection of seven Charles Lever first editions	£775.00
	Total		£7,350.00
2007 - 2008	Down County Museum	Items from Annesley Estate	£658.34
	Down County Museum	'Down Cathedral' by Patric Stevenson	£1,000.00
	Ballymena Museum	UVF Material 1912-14	£1,250.00
	Ballymoney Museum	30 Emigrant Letters	£200.00
	Newry and Mourne Museum	5 glass decanters	£1,500.00
	Coleraine Museum	2 pictures by A D McCormick	£415.79
	Coleraine Museum	Two drawings by Hugh Thompson and painting by Joseph Carey	£1,389.37
	Ballymoney Museum	C18th medical Book	£200.00
	Newry and Mourne Museum	Cake Delivery Box	£400.00
	Coleraine Museum	3 drawings by Hugh Thomson	£1,680.00
	Total		£8,693.50

Year	Museum	Object	Grant Claimed
2008 -2009	Down County Museum	United Irishmen and Ballykinler Group Documents	£1,750.00
	Mid-Antrim Museum	Two clocks	£3,425.00
	Down County Museum	Items relating to Dr Hodges	£400.00
	Derry Heritage and Museum Service	Pacata Hibernia	£2,000.00
	Coleraine Museum	Dunluce castle LMS Poster	£925.00
	Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum	Medals of Pte T Stewart	£450.00
	National Trust - Springhill	Picture - 'Boy with Candle'	£2,000.00
	Lisburn Museum	Picture - 'Henri de Massue de Ruvigny'	£4,000.00
	Sentry Hill	Stoneware Water Jug	£250.00
	Larne Museum	Model of 'Mayflower'	£275.00
	Coleraine Museum	Three Hugh Thompson drawings	£1,875.00
	Total		£17,350
2009 -2010	Coleraine Museum	Silver golfing trophy	£520.00
	Coleraine Museum	'Highways and Byways' by Hugh Thomson	£1,700.00
	Down County Museum	'Strangford Lough' by Percy French	£1,000.00
	Fermanagh County Museum	'Tree Calligraphy' by Jeremy Henderson	£1,000.00
	National Trust – The Argory	Portrait of Walter McGeogh Bond	£725.00
	Newry and Mourne Museum	Two Photomontages by Sean Hillan	£2,000.00
	Total		£6,945.00

Libraries NI

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of libraries currently under the control of Libraries NI that were inherited from the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB); (ii) the postal addresses of these libraries; and (iii) the opening hours of the libraries (a) now; and (b) when they were under the control of the BELB.

(AQW 6374/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

- (i) There are currently 20 libraries under the control of Libraries NI that were inherited from the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB).
- (ii) The postal address of each library is noted in the table below.

Andersonstown	Slievegallion Drive	Belfast	BT11 8JP
Ardoyne	446-450 Crumlin Road	Belfast	BT14 7GH
Ballyhackamore	1-3 Eastleigh Drive	Belfast	BT4 3DX
Ballymacarrett	19-35 Templemore Avenue	Belfast	BT5 4FP
Belfast Central Library	Royal Avenue	Belfast	BT1 1EA
Chichester	Salisbury Avenue	Belfast	BT15 5EB
Falls road	49 Falls Road	Belfast	BT12 4PD
Finaghy	38B Finaghy Road South	Belfast	BT10 0DR
Grove	120 York Road	Belfast	BT15 3HF
Hollywood Arches	4-12 Hollywood Road	Belfast	BT4 1NT
Ligoniel	53-55 Ligoniel Road	Belfast	BT14 8BW
Lisburn Road	440 Lisburn Road	Belfast	BT9 6GR
Oldpark	46 Oldpark Road	Belfast	BT14 6FR
Ormeau	Ormeau Road Embankment	Belfast	BT7 3GG
Sandy Row	127 Sandy Row	Belfast	BT12 5ET
Shankill	298-300 Shankill Road	Belfast	BT13 2BN
Suffolk	Stewartstown Road	Belfast	BT11 9JP
Whiterock	Whiterock Road	Belfast	BT12 7FW
Whitewell	Ballygolan Primary School	Belfast	BT36 7HB
Woodstock	358 Woodstock Road	Belfast	BT6 9DQ

- (iii) The current (2009-10) opening hours for each library and the opening hours when these libraries were under the control of BELB (2008-09) are noted below.

		2008-09	2009-10
Andersonstown	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Andersonstown and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Ardoyne	Monday	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30
	Tuesday	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 19:00	13:30 - 19:00
	Friday	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Ardoyne and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Ballyhackamore	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09	2009-10
Ballymacarrett	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Ballymacarrett and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Belfast Central	Monday	09:00 - 20:00	09:00 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:00 - 20:00	09:00 - 20:00
	Wednesday	09:00 - 20:00	09:00 - 20:00
	Thursday	09:00 - 20:00	09:00 - 20:00
	Friday	09:00 - 17:30	09:00 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:00 - 16:30	09:00 - 16:30

		2008-09	2009-10
Chichester	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Chichester and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Falls Road	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09	2009-10
Finaghy	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Thursday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09	2009-10
Grove	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09	2009-10
Holywood Arches	Monday	09:30 - 20:00	09:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 20:00	09:30 - 20:00
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:00	09:30 - 17:00
	Thursday	09:30 - 20:00	09:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:00	09:30 - 17:00
	Saturday	10:00 - 17:00	10:00 - 17:00

		2008-09	2009-10
Ligoniel	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 12:30	09:30 - 12:30
		13:30 - 17:30	13:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 12:30	09:30 - 12:30
		13:30 - 17:30	13:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 12:30	09:30 - 12:30
		13:30 - 17:30	13:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Ligoniel and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Lisburn Road	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09 (July onward)	2009-10
Oldpark	Monday	Closed	Closed
	Tuesday	10:00 - 12:30 13:00 - 17:00	10:00 - 12:30 13:00 - 17:00
	Wednesday	Closed	Closed
	Thursday	Closed	Closed
	Friday	Closed	Closed
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Oldpark and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. In September 2008 BELB did not restore normal opening hours in Oldpark. Libraries NI inherited the revised opening hours when it took responsibility on 1 April 2009 and has continued to operate them during 2009/10. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours further in 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Ormeau	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09 (July onward)	2009-10
Sandy Row	Monday	Closed	Closed
	Tuesday	09:30 - 13:00 13:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 13:00 13:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	Closed	Closed
	Thursday	Closed	Closed
	Friday	09:30 - 13:00 13:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 13:00 13:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Sandy Row and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. In September 2008 BELB did not restore normal opening hours in Sandy Row. Libraries NI inherited the revised opening hours when it took responsibility on 1 April 2009 and has continued to operate them during 2009/10. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours further in 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Shankill	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30

		2008-09	2009-10
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

		2008-09	2009-10
Suffolk	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Suffolk and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Whiterock	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Whiterock and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

		2008-09	2009-10
Whitewell	Monday	14:00 - 17:00	14:00 - 17:00
	Tuesday	Closed	Closed
	Wednesday	14:00 - 17:00	14:00 - 17:00
	Thursday	Closed	Closed
	Friday	Closed	Closed
	Saturday	Closed	Closed

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Whitewell and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. In September 2008 BELB did not restore normal opening hours in Whitewell. Libraries NI inherited the revised opening hours when it took responsibility on 1 April 2009 and has continued to operate them during 2009/10. Whitewell was also closed during July and August in 2009 as toilet facilities are in the school and are only available when it is open. During July and August 2009 additional mobile provision was made.

		2008-09	2009-10
Woodstock	Monday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Tuesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Wednesday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Thursday	13:30 - 20:00	13:30 - 20:00
	Friday	09:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 17:30
	Saturday	09:30 - 13:00	09:30 - 13:00

During 2008 BELB implemented Summer Opening Hours in Woodstock and opening hours were shortened during the summer months. Libraries NI did not reduce opening hours in summer 2009.

Libraries NI

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to libraries previously controlled by the Belfast Education and Library Board but which are now under the control of Libraries NI, to detail (i) the number of employees; and (ii) the grade and job description of each employee, who provided (a) support staff services; and (b) external support services at each of these libraries (c) now; and (d) when they were under the control of the Belfast Education and Library Board.

(AQW 6433/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Support Staff Services are provided centrally by Libraries NI staff, most of whom are currently based in Lisburn. The cost of these services is not allocated to individual branch libraries. The following staff provide these services to the entire Libraries NI organisation:

	Description	Number	Grade
1.	Director of Business Support	1	Second Tier Officer
2.	Personal Assistant	1	Executive Officer
3.	HR Manager	1	Senior Principal Officer 2
4.	Senior HR Officer	1	Assistant Principal Officer
5.	HR Officer	1	Admin Officer
6.	HR Executive Officer	2	Executive Officer
7.	HR Assistant	2	Senior Clerical Officer
8.	Finance Manager	1	Education Officer
9.	Senior Finance Officer	1	Assistant Principal Officer
10.	Finance Admin Officer	1	Admin Officer
11.	Finance Clerk	4	Senior Clerical Officer
12.	Payroll Officer	1	Admin Officer
13.	Assistant Payroll Officer	3	Executive Officer
14.	Assets Manager	1	Education Officer
15.	Assistant Assets Officer	1	Admin Officer
16.	Senior IT Support Officer	1	Senior Admin Officer

A full job description for each post is available in the Assembly Library.

Libraries NI do not provide external support services.

Before 1 April 2009 staff support services were provided centrally by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and funded from Department of Education's budget. BELB officials have informed me that no amount was charged to the branch libraries (or the library budget) for these costs, and it is not possible for BELB to distinguish between the support staff costs for education and libraries as they operated integrated staff support systems.

Belfast Education and Library Board: Library Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the annual cost of providing the Belfast Education and Library Board's library service.

(AQW 6452/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Chief Executive of BELB has advised me of the spend attributed to each branch library under his control as Accounting Officer in 2008/09. The table below shows the total expenditure breakdown for the library service in the former Belfast Education and Library Board area, prior to the formation of Libraries NI:

	Expenditure (£) *
Stock	316,000
Belfast Central Library **	2,697,893
Andersonstown	67,544
Ardoyne	68,973
Ballyhackamore	155,618
Ballymacarrett	110,635
Chichester	129,861
Falls Road	129,148
Finaghy	120,735
Hollywood Road	127,184
Ligoniel	64,009
Lisburn Road	120,172
Oldpark Road	17,240
Ormeau Road	158,496
Sandy Row	21,159
Shankill	157,448
Suffolk	132,523
Whiterock	150,377
Whitewell	8,628
Woodstock Road	152,984
Grove Wellbeing centre	170,652
Mobile Libraries	113,268
Redundancies ***	312,000

	Expenditure (£) *
Total	5,502,547

- * These figures do not include the cost of the library management and public internet system (ELFNI) which operated across all of Northern Ireland's public libraries and was funded separately.
- ** The Belfast Central Library figure includes some BELB central libraries administration costs (e.g. Chief Librarian's salary, ordering books, preparing invoices for payments).
- *** In order to prepare for Libraries NI's formation under the Review of Public Administration BELB carried out a redundancy scheme in March 2009.

Grand Opera House

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if the payment of £1.736m for over-run costs by his Department to the Grand Opera House without retrospective approval from the Department of Finance and Personnel was a breach of protocol.

(AQW 6483/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The decision to award additional funding to the Grand Opera House was not taken lightly and was based on a significant body of evidence which was analysed before the Department agreed to make the payment.

The decision was taken by the DCAL accounting officer. In exceptional circumstances it is within the remit of an accounting officer to decide to make a payment whether or not the Department of Finance and Personnel approves the business case.

The Department concluded that that an additional funding contribution of £1.736m was essential to enable the Grand Opera House to meet its obligations, remain operationally viable and regain a stable financial position. In reaching this decision the Department also took into consideration the significance of the Grand Opera House to the arts sector in Northern Ireland and that £6million of public money had already been invested through DCAL and the Arts Council.

Creative Industries

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the £5m investment in the creative industries.

(AQO 1134/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Most recent estimates indicate there are some 36,000 people in Northern Ireland employed in the creative industries or in creative occupations. This represents approximately 4.6% of the workforce.

In 2008 my Department secured funding from the Northern Ireland Innovation Fund to undertake a three year programme to boost local creative industries. This includes the provision of a Creative Industries Innovation Fund and a range of related initiatives to support innovation in business, by people, and through sectoral knowledge and development.

In 2008/09, £660,000 was declared as an easement as the early part of that year involved the development of a Strategic Action Plan for the Creative Industries and the subsequent Fund was not launched until October 2008. Therefore the investment to support the sector over 2008-2011 via the Fund and other initiatives is approximately £4.34M

The Fund, which is administered by the Arts Council, has made awards to date totalling £3.62M to 133 individual businesses and 23 sectoral bodies. Supported companies have included those working in film, digital media, music, craft and the performing arts. I am pleased to report that early stage evaluation findings indicate that many businesses have significantly increased innovation and international activity.

Moving forward, the Arts Council will continue to monitor project delivery and my Department will evaluate the outcomes and full impact of the Fund and other initiatives and work with key stakeholders to further develop policy and strategies to support and enhance the creative industries in Northern Ireland.

DCAL Projects: North Belfast

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a summary of the projects planned by his Department for North Belfast in the current financial year, including the total capital investment involved.

(AQO 1139/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There are seven separate capital projects planned for North Belfast in the current financial year. The total capital investment in these projects planned for 2010-11 is £6.466m, broken down as follows:

- Construction of the Mac - £5,000K
- Belfast Royal Academy: Synthetic hockey pitch - £6.125k (Total project investment of £245k)
- Crusaders FC: Upgrade to 3G synthetic surface - £15.681k (Total project investment of £209.075k)
- Woodvale Cricket Club: Artificial pitch, drainage and new equipment - £45.051k (Total project investment of £186.8k)
- Crusaders FC: Provision of covered seating and turnstiles - £650k (Total project investment of £650k)
- Belfast Central Library: Restoration of stonework - £649k (Total project investment of £748k)
- Belfast Central Library: Redevelopment of facilities: - £100k (Total project investment of £25,000k)

There are five separate resource projects planned for North Belfast in the current financial year.

- Annual Support for Organisations Programme: numerous projects.
- Re-imaging Programme: Lower Shankill Community Association and New Lodge Arts.
- Ulster-Scots Agency: Ballysillan Highland Dancers
- Foras na Gaeilge: Cumann Culturtha Mhic Reachtain (McCracken Cultural Society)
- Foras na Gaeilge: Iontaobhas Ultach (Ultach Trust)

Galbally GAA Club: Hunger Strike Commemoration

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has received the report from the Ulster Council GAA on last year's republican demonstration at Galbally GAA Club.

(AQO 1140/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has recently received a letter from the Ulster Council of the GAA enclosing a report on issues surrounding the Hunger Strike commemoration at Galbally on 16th August last. This report states that the event was taken forward independently of the GAA and that the main focus was the Galbally Community Centre which is not Association property. The report also states that there is no evidence that the Galbally Pearse's Gaelic club exceeded its position or that it organised the event. DCAL received the letter late last week and I will be reviewing it to make sure that it satisfactorily addresses all the issues.

The Ulster Council also enclosed, with its letter and report, a copy of a letter from the Association's Director General, Páraic Duffy, which issued a few weeks ago to all GAA Provincial and County Secretaries. In this letter the GAA reiterates its policy in relation to the use of premises for party political purposes and for other purposes that are clearly politically motivated or linked to a party

political opinion. This policy stipulates that grounds and facilities should not be used under any circumstances for any party political purpose whatsoever. It further states that any use for other purposes is subject to the sanction of the GAA's Central Council.

I understand that the letter arose from a number of recent incidents, including the hunger strike commemoration at Galbally, last August. I also understand that the GAA plans to produce a clear policy document on the use of Association property in the coming weeks. I am advised that the purpose of the recent circular is to remind members of existing rules in advance of the policy document being produced.

2012 Olympics

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any meetings he has planned for the next six months aimed at ensuring that Northern Ireland can benefit from the London 2012 Olympics. **(AQO 1141/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department leads and co-ordinates Northern Ireland's response to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. I chair a Northern Ireland 2012 Leadership Group that provides strategic direction, advice and guidance to ensure that NI maximises the unique opportunities presented by the Games and the delivery of a sporting, social and economic legacy. The 2012 Leadership Group meets 3 times per year. Membership includes the Chairpersons from Arts Council NI, Disability Sport NI, SportNI, NITB, InvestNI, and senior representatives from the Department of Education NI, Department of Employment and Learning NI, Local Government, Volunteer Now (previously the Volunteer Development Agency) and a NI VIP Ambassador.

During the next six months I will be meeting a number of National Olympic and Paralympic Committee representatives in relation to securing countries and teams for pre Games training camps in Northern Ireland. I will also be contacting Lord Coe Chair of the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) to discuss what other ways Northern Ireland could benefit from the Games. My officials will continue to have regular meetings with counterparts in LOCOG.

Festival of Fools

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial support his Department is providing for the upcoming Festival of Fools in Belfast and to outline the projected revenue benefits from the festival. **(AQO 1144/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The 2010 Festival of Fools has been awarded £40,000 Lottery Funding from the Arts Council and £5,000 from the Community Festivals Fund. Half of this Community Festivals Fund grant is provided by DCAL with match funding being provided by Belfast City Council.

As the festival is mainly street performance, which is free to the public, there is no box office income. However, the public can make donations in collection hats on the street, with an estimated £3,000 contributed in 2009.

A survey carried out by the Festival of Fools during the 2009 event indicated that the festival attracted an audience of 42,000, 79% of whom were visiting Belfast specifically to attend the festival. Over the five days of the festival, the adult spend per head was estimated at £16.19. The overall additional revenue generated for the city was therefore estimated at approximately £680,000.

The projected audience for 2010 is 44,000.

Disabled Young People: Outdoor Pursuits

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he is taking to increase access to outdoor pursuits for young people with a disability.

(AQO 1146/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am committed to improving sports participation rates amongst people with a disability, including young people with a disability, under Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019. This commitment applies to sport generally in Northern Ireland including sports undertaken in an outdoor pursuits context. Furthermore, Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding has, since 2006, invested in Disability Sports Northern Ireland (DSNI), the lead development body for disability sports, to help it implement its Disability Mainstreaming Policy. As part of the implementation of this policy, DSNI is working on improving access to outdoor sports opportunities for disabled people. SNI is also a co-founder of the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN) and supported CAAN's Barriers to Participation research in 2008 which sought to identify ways of overcoming the barriers limiting participation in countryside recreation for people with a disability.

In addition, DCAL's current strategy with regard to improving access to angling by persons with a disability (including young people) is to maintain existing disabled angler stands and improve access at two new facilities per year. DCAL also produces a disabled angler's guide and maintains and enhances an angling website which provides specific information targeted for disabled anglers.

Department of Education

Irish-medium Unit at St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of an Irish-medium unit at St Joseph's grammar school, Donaghmore; and when a final decision will be made so that parents and children affected can decide on transfer options.

(AQW 5475/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Fógaraíodh faomhadh d'aonad Gaeilge a bhunú ar Scoil Naomh Seosamh Domhnach Mór ar 23 Márta 2010.

Approval to establish an Irish-medium unit at St Joseph's Donaghmore was announced on 23 March 2010.

St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action she intends to take to assure parents, whose children did not obtain a place in the reception class of St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge, for enrolment in September 2010, that a place will be provided for them at this school.

(AQW 6432/10)

Minister of Education: Leis na socruithe atá ann le haghaidh iontráil daltaí ar bhunscoileanna, bíonn tuismitheoirí ábalta a rogha a chur in iúl maidir leis an scoil ar mhian leo go bhfreastalóidh a bpáiste uirthi. Ní féidir gealltanais a thabhairt do pháiste ar bith go bhfaighidh siad áit ag scoil áirithe, áfach.

The arrangements for the admission of pupils to primary schools enables parents to express a preference as to the school they wish their child to attend. However, no child can be guaranteed a place at any school. If St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge is over-subscribed with Year 1 applications for the 2011/12 school year, it will be for the Board of Governors to determine, through the application of their published admissions criteria, which pupils will be admitted. If the school is under-subscribed, all applicants will be admitted.

DE: Capital Budget 2010-11

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the reasons for her reduced capital budget in 2010/11.

(AQO 1147/10)

Minister of Education: My Department's budget is set by the Executive. The Capital Budget for education in 2010/11 is £169 million.

I would point out that in the last two years my Department has fully utilised the capital funds available to it. Since May 2007, 39 major capital school projects have been completed representing an investment of over £253m in our schools estate. This includes 4 schools in the Strangford Constituency, Kircubbin Nursery School, Nendrum College, Saintfield High School and Victoria Primary School.

A further 16 major capital school projects are currently on site representing a further investment of over £252m. This includes St Josephs Primary School situated in the Strangford Constituency.

Cinnteoídh an t-athbhreithniú atá ar siúl faoi láthair ar gach oibreacha reatha caipitil go n-úsáidfear gach sócmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Ba mhaith liom foirgnimh nua a thógáil agus leanfaidh mé de bheith ag éileamh cistí breise caipitil agus tá mé ag tnúth le tacaíocht a fháil ó gach páirtí maidir leis an tsaincheist seo.

The review of existing capital works which is underway will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for every taxpayer. I want to build new schools and I will continue to press for additional capital funds and look forward to receiving support from all parties and members in in-year rounds on this issue.

Early Years Strategy

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Education to outline how the £1.5 million that has been set aside for an Early Years strategy will be spent.

(AQO 1148/10)

Minister of Education: Chíor mé an dréacht Straitéis Luathbhlianta (náid go sé bhliana d'aois) agus thug mé comhairle do m'fheidhmeannaigh é seo a thabhairt ar aghaidh agus é a ullmhú do chomhairliúchán poiblí. Aithním go maith cé chomh tábhachtach is atá sé chun infheistiú a dhéanamh i soláthar do na luathbhlianta lena chinntiú go mbíonn an tús is fearr is féidir ag páistí lena saol.

I have considered the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy and have advised my officials to take this forward, and to prepare for public consultation. I very much recognise the importance of investing in early years provision to ensure that our children have the best possible start in life.

There are a range of areas relevant to early years which would benefit from additional funding and which far exceed the level of funding that I have been able to make available this year.

I am currently considering the options for investing the £1.5 m in light of the likely timescale for the consultation and finalisation of the strategy.

Education and Library Boards

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Education for an update on the convergence process for the Education and Library Boards.

(AQO 1152/10)

Minister of Education: Is é is aidhm le Coinbhéirseacht ná riarachán a shruthlíniú; inathraitheacht i soláthar seirbhísí a bhaint; agus torthaí oideachais a fheabhsú trí sholáthar níos comhsheasmhaí níos dírithe eochairpholasaithe. Mar a éilítear sa Phlean Soláthair Choinbhéirseachta, tá an Príomhfheidhmeannach (Ainmnithe) agus na Stiúrthóirí (Ainmnithe) ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna ag obair chun struchtúir chuí réigiúnacha bhainistíochta a shainiú le haghaidh réimse seirbhísí.

The purpose of Convergence is to streamline administration; remove variability in service delivery; and improve educational outcomes through more consistent and focused delivery of key policies. As required in the Convergence Delivery Plan, the Chief Executive (Designate) and the Directors (Designate) of the Education and Skills Authority have been working to identify appropriate regional management structures for a range of services.

Work is also currently taking place on governance arrangements, structural requirements, timetables and frameworks for the regional management of these services and will continue over the summer so that with the agreement, commitment and goodwill of all the affected bodies, implementation will begin later this year.

Education and Library Boards

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education what is the current legal lifespan of the transitional Education and Library Boards and how this impacts on her decision not to re-constitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQO 1155/10)

Minister of Education: Gheall an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin go mbeadh 1 Eanáir 2010 ina dháta bunaithe don Údarás nua um Oideachas agus Scileanna (ESA) a ghlacfaidh feidhmeanna na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar láimh. Ní dheachaigh an Bille um Oideachais ar aghaidh chuig an gcéim bhreithnithe, áfach, cionn is nach ndearna an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin cíoradh ar na leasuithe a bhí curtha síos agam, ag an gCoiste Oideachais ná ag baill aonair. Creidim go n-aithníonn mo chomhghleacaithe ar an gCoiste Feidhmiúcháin an gá le dul ar aghaidh go práinneach leis an leasú riachtanach seo sa riarachán oideachais d'fhonn go bhféadfai an tÚdarás nua seo a bhunú ag an dáta is luaithe is féidir.

The Executive committed itself to 1 January 2010 as the establishment date for the new Education and Skills Authority ESA which is to take over the functions of the Education and Library Boards. However, the Education Bill has not proceeded to Consideration Stage because the Executive has not yet considered the amendments that have been tabled by the Education Committee, by individual Members and by myself. I trust that my Executive colleagues recognise the need to proceed urgently on this much-needed reform of education administration so that the new authority can be established at the earliest possible date.

I have had to put in place arrangements until ESA is established. The Education and Library Boards are being constituted for the transitional period within the existing legislation and my Department is satisfied that the action being taken complies with my powers to determine and appoint board members.

I decided that the most appropriate way forward for the South Eastern Education and Library Board is for the four Commissioners to stay on for the transitional period.

Schools: Academic Selection

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of why schools which apply academic selection cannot agree on a single test.

(AQO 1156/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach i dTreoir mo Roinne um Aistriú 2010 an bealach chun tosaigh do gach scoil maidir le páistí a chumasú chun aistriú ó bhunscoil go hiarbhunscoil gan a bheith ag dul trí thástáil neamhiontaofa neamhriachtanach strusmhar. Tá an treoir sin fós ina seasamh mo Roinne.

My Department's Transfer 2010 guidance sets the way forward for all schools to enable children to transfer from primary to post-primary school without the need for stressful, unnecessary and unsound testing. This guidance remains the position of my Department.

It is now time for the small group of break-away schools to stop the outdated practice of academic selection. I urge them to join with the rest of the education system and ensure that every child can access a good education without having their future held to ransom on the results of an unregulated test.

No child should be put through the pressure of one test, let alone multiple tests. Rather than bickering about how to pick and reject 10-year-olds, we should all commit ourselves to meeting the real challenges in education; raising standards; tackling underachievement and reforming our education system – that is what will make the real difference to our children's futures.

A-level Students

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Education how many pupils continued their studies to A-Level in the 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic years.

(AQO 1160/10)

Minister of Education: There was an increase of 5.7 percentage points in the number of pupils in Year 13 in post-primary schools studying A – Levels or equivalent, in relation to the number of pupils in Year 12 in the previous academic year, from 2007/08 to 2009/10.

In the 2007/08 academic year, there were 14,088 pupils in Year 13 in post-primary schools studying A – Levels or equivalent. This represents 54.7% of Year 12 pupils in post-primary schools in 2006/07.

In the 2008/09 academic year there were 14,570 pupils in Year 13 in post-primary schools, studying A – Levels or equivalent. This represents 57.2% of Year 12 pupils in post-primary schools in 2007/08.

In the 2009/10 academic year, there were 14,774 pupils in Year 13 in post-primary schools, studying A – Levels or equivalent. This represents 60.4% of Year 12 pupils in post-primary schools in 2008/09.

Tá daltaí a chreideann go bhfuil an t-am a chaitheann siad ar scoil tábhachtach dóibh ina ndaltaí is dóichí a fhanfaidh a ghabháil don oideachas; agus ní amháin go méadóidh sé seo rátaí fanúna, ach feabhsóidh sé caighdeán fosta.

Pupils who see their time at school as relevant to them are more likely to stay engaged with education; this will not only increase staying on rates but also drive up standards.

Schools: Holywood

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education for an update on the capital project for schools in Holywood.

(AQO 1161/10)

Minister of Education: As I noted at the recent adjournment debate on the Holywood schools, it is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish-Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops, these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

Ós rud é go bhfuil an t-athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil ar siúl go fóill, níl mé in ann trácht a dhéanamh ar dhul chun cinn na scoileanna molta nua in Ard Mhic Nasca nó ar dhul chun cinn aon tionscadail eile um fhoirgnimh nua. Mar gheall ar an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an gcion oibre seo, is riachtanach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar lánbhreithniú do gach tionscadal, sula ndéantar aon chinneadh.

As the review of all capital projects is currently ongoing, I cannot at this time comment on the future progress of the proposed new schools for Holywood or any other new build projects. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken.

The Education budget as you will be aware is set by the Executive. In my budget statement on 21 April 2010 I highlighted the challenging financial position being faced. My Department has tough decisions to make and I look forward to support from all parties when I make bids for additional funding during

in year monitoring rounds. All capital projects, including the Hollywood schools need to be considered against the policy framework in place and in light of the budget available.

Department for Employment and Learning

Regional Colleges

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department has taken to develop links between regional colleges and other international institutions of a similar nature.
(AQW 6390/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department is committed to encouraging Further Education colleges to increase their international profile through the development of links with similar international institutions.

As part of this commitment, the British Council (NI), in a joint venture with the Department, has established a project to promote and raise the international profile of Further Education, and Higher Education, called “Choose Northern Ireland (NI)”. My Department has committed £99,500 for the period April 2008 – June 2010 to support Choose NI, which is building alliances, identifying potential target countries for marketing purposes and, ultimately, increasing the number of international students coming to study in Northern Ireland.

Additionally, following my recent visit to Washington DC, colleges are actively seeking to progress a number of opportunities identified for future collaboration, through the American Association of Community College and Northern Virginia Community College.

Regional Colleges

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what projects are (i) ongoing; or (ii) planned between regional colleges and similar institutions outside the British Isles.
(AQW 6391/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: All six Further Education (FE) colleges have a wide ranging international dimension to their work. Details of projects currently underway with similar institutions outside of the British Isles are listed at Annex A.

Additionally, following my recent visit to Washington DC, colleges are actively seeking to progress a number of opportunities identified for future collaboration, through the American Association of Community College and Northern Virginia Community College.

ANNEX A

Regional College	Project	Organisation	Location
SWC	Carbon Zero NI	Ireland Institute of Pittsburgh	USA
SWC	Comenius STEM Assistant	Linköping University	Sweden
SWC	Comenius ESOL Assistant	Xios University	Belgium
NWRC	NWRC – NEU Alliance	Northeastern University Shenyang	China
NWRC	ESCI	ESCI (Graduate School of International Buisness)	France

Regional College	Project	Organisation	Location
NWRC	New Horizons	Korsor Production School	Denmark
NWRC	Solid Waste	Studiorum - Uni	Italy
SRC	Open web Learning Partnership	Universidad Rey Juan Carlos	Spain
NRC	Memorandum of Understanding	Morehead State University	USA
NRC	Memorandum of Understanding	Instituto de Maquina y Herramienta	Spain
SERC	Exchange Programme	Toyama College	Japan
SERC	Digital Media	Europaschule Westerstede	Germany
SERC	Short Film Production	Besancon College	France
BMC	Memorandum of Understanding	Koning Willem 1st College	Netherlands
BMC	Memorandum of Understanding	Kodolanyi Janos Univeristy of Applied Sciences	Hungary

NEETs

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the timescale for publishing the scoping study and introducing a strategy on young people not in education, employment or training.

(AQO 1165/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The issue of young people not in education, employment or training is a high priority for me. That is why my Department is taking the lead and producing a scoping study which is in final editing stages and should be completed very soon. However, it is clear from this work that the issues affecting these young people are cross-departmental and multi-agency in nature. For example, in 2007/08, 80.1% of those young people who left school at year 12 did not achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*- C including both English and Maths. This represented 8,046 young people of the 10,050 who left school. Clearly the need to improve educational attainment is a key component in any work to prevent young people from falling into inactivity. Indeed there is a strong argument for early intervention.

Since any specific action plan or strategy which might be developed on foot of the scoping study will need to be carried forward on a cross-departmental basis, I intend to bring a paper on the subject to my Executive colleagues for consideration as soon as possible.

It is important to stress that my own Department already has in place a wide range of programmes and initiatives commencing with guidance provided by the Careers Service, Employment Service provision, programmes such as Training for Success, the Success through Skills Strategy, and widening participation initiatives in both Further Education and Higher Education.

A wide range of provision is therefore available depending on the needs of the individual. However, we are not complacent and the development of a strategy will inform future provision.

Redundancies

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans his Department has in place to respond to any further large-scale redundancies.

(AQO 1167/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has established redundancy service procedures which enable it to respond effectively to large scale redundancies. The Employment Service co-ordinates delivery of a tailored package of support including partner organisations such as the Social Security Agency, the Careers Service, the appropriate Regional College and, where appropriate, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Unfortunately, the Department has significant experience in the provision of a redundancy service to companies facing large scale redundancies. Over the past 12-18 months the Employment Service has delivered tailored packages of support to Seagate in Limavady; Nortel in Monkstown; Hughes Christensen in East Belfast and Arntz Belling in Londonderry.

Careers Guidance

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what his Department is doing to provide learners with well-resourced, professional career guidance which directs them to opportunities in growth industries.

(AQO 1170/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department employs over 100 professionally qualified Careers Advisers to deliver client-centred, careers guidance throughout Northern Ireland to young people and adults. A number of these Careers Advisers are also trained to work with clients with disabilities. 23 additional advisers have been recruited in the past year. The careers guidance process enables clients to realise their skills, abilities, interests and aspirations. Access to up to date careers information is vital in the career decision making process. Improving access to careers information is a key theme in "Preparing for Success" the careers strategy which has been developed jointly by my Department and the Department of Education. In conjunction with the Sector Skills Councils my Department has produced Industry Factsheets to highlight opportunities in growth industries and assist in the career decision making process.

The Strategy also highlights the need for improved access to careers services and my Department plans to enhance delivery by establishing a number of Careers Resource Centres.

Apprenticeships

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning the number of new apprenticeship places planned for the current financial year and how this compares to previous years.

(AQO 1171/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The success of the Northern Ireland economy is dependent on a well trained workforce including a regular supply of apprentices, especially young people, employed across the industry.

The number of new apprenticeships is, therefore, determined by employers' recruitment of apprentices and whether or not individuals meet the eligibility criteria to enrol on the programme. The flexibility of ApprenticeshipsNI enables apprentices to join the programme throughout the year.

Despite the economic recession, new apprenticeship places have grown from 3,341 in 2005/06 to 7,372 in 2008/09 and 6,958 in 2009/10. In addition, young people are on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme because they have been unable to secure employment and wish to be trained to be ready to avail of opportunities when the economy recovers.

Based on the information from the last two years it is likely that there will be around 7,000 new apprenticeship places in this current financial year.

Universities: Local Students

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what his Department is doing to encourage more of our students to remain in Northern Ireland to attend university.

(AQO 1172/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Research has indicated that, in the main, those who opt for a university place in Great Britain as their first choice, do so because they believe that that institution is the best place to study their chosen subject and gives them the development opportunity to live and study away from home. In that respect these students are 'determined leavers'.

Students, in an increasingly global society, should continue to have a free choice of academic institute within the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere, and my Department has no plans to prevent students from opting for universities elsewhere as their first choice rather than universities in Northern Ireland.

As the economy recovers, there is an opportunity for business and government, working together, to highlight the employment opportunities available in Northern Ireland to these graduates and undergraduates. This 'Attract' work will form an important aspect of the revised and updated Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland which will be published for public consultation shortly.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

International Events

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures are being taken to promote and develop Northern Ireland's ability to host major international events.

(AQO 1137/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The responsibility for Northern Ireland Events transferred on 1st April 2010 from the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB).

The draft Tourism Strategy to 2020, which is currently out for consultation, identifies events as a key driver for tourism. In recognition of the value of major events to the economy of Northern Ireland NITB is undertaking a range of activities. These include:

Promotion - Working closely with Tourism Ireland to promote Northern Ireland as an event-based destination in our key markets.

Partnership – Working closely with stakeholders to maximise the opportunities for Northern Ireland to develop its major events capacity and potential.

Maximising our Opportunities – Through product development, marketing and events support, NITB is engaged in a wide range of major events for Northern Ireland in the coming years, including support to attract the Clipper round the world yacht race, the celebration of the Titanic in 2012 and the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

Events Financial Support – With a £800k budget to support events in 2011/12, NITB will be working with the industry to determine how best to deploy these funds within the context of the Tourism Strategy

Consultation - NITB will be conducting an events industry consultation commencing in early June 2010. Following this a new events plan will be developed and implemented.

Feed-in Tariffs

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he will introduce 'feed-in tariffs' in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 6490/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: A Feed-In Tariff (FIT) was introduced in Great Britain on 1 April 2010. Northern Ireland does not currently have the legislative powers to replicate this.

I have however recently legislated for enhanced Renewables Obligation Certificates for certain small scale technologies to ensure that Northern Ireland generators are not disadvantaged by the introduction of a FIT in the rest of the United Kingdom.

A study is currently underway which will consider the cost of introducing a FIT in Northern Ireland as there are a number of considerations to be taken into account, not least the impact on electricity prices here.

I intend to make an announcement on this issue later in the year.

Department of the Environment

Closet River, Kinnego

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the findings of any water samples taken from the Closet River, Kinnego in the last twelve months.

(AQW 6306/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): Northern Ireland Environment Agency has not taken any water samples from the Closet River in the last twelve months. The Agency opened a site on the Closet River this year to collect samples to provide chemical data but no data is available at this early stage.

Closet River, Kinnego

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment for her assessment of the cleanliness of the Closet River, Kinnego.

(AQW 6309/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Closet River's current overall status is poor, based on the European Water Framework Directive classification, with the objective set to reach moderate status by 2015. The status was based on an environmental risk assessment, taking into account known pressures on the Closet River water body.

Driving Instruction Industry

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to outline any plans he has to ensure that people joining the driving instruction industry have the appropriate level of education and qualifications and the necessary skills and motivation which makes them suitable for this profession.

(AQW 6361/10)

Minister of the Environment: Those seeking to join the driving instruction industry are required to pass a rigorous three-part entrance test to ensure they have the appropriate knowledge and skills. The three-part test for prospective instructors consists of a theory test, a practical driving test and a test of their ability to instruct.

My officials will be issuing a consultation paper later this year on proposals to strengthen further the regulation of the industry in relation to qualifications, registration and standards.

Driving Instructors

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of convictions for people operating as driving instructors without the required qualifications or licence in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6430/10)

Minister of the Environment: Since the PSNI is the prosecuting authority for cases of illegal driving instruction, my Department may not be aware of every incident or conviction. However, the Driver & Vehicle Agency, which maintains the register of approved driving instructors, is aware of two cases of unregistered instruction that were detected and prosecuted in 2007 and of two further cases that are now pending with PSNI.

CCTV Systems in Local Councils

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many CCTV systems have been installed by each local council, in each of the last five years; (ii) the location of each system; and (iii) the average cost of (a) installing; and (b) operating each system.

(AQW 6528/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Temporary Staff in the Health Service

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of temporary staff in clerical and administrative positions (i) currently working in the Health Service; and (ii) who have worked in the Health Service for more than one year in the same position.

(AQW 5832/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey):

- (i) The number of temporary administrative and clerical staff within the Health Service is 1100 (headcount) 958.97 (WTE). This represents 8.8% of all administrative and clerical staff (based on headcount or WTE).

The reasons given for the use of temporary staff include: (i) cover for maternity leave, (ii) long-term sick leave, (iii) RPA implications, (iv) staff acting up to a different band, (v) secondments both inside and outside the Trusts, (vi) career breaks, (vii) vacancies, (viii) unpaid leave, (ix) increased workload and also (x) posts created from (a) project work, and (b) outside funding for research.

- (ii) This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Notes:

- 1. WTE = Whole-time equivalent

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority recommendations on the use of residential facilities for day clients, particularly for people with severe learning disabilities.

(AQW 6260/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: RQIA has registered 48 nursing and residential care homes to provide day care services, through a variation to their existing registration as either nursing or residential care homes.

Twelve of these facilities cater for people with a learning disability.

The ability of residential and nursing homes to offer a limited number of day care places is considered by RQIA as appropriate, as this may enable some people with learning disability to remain living at home for longer than would otherwise be possible.

My Department has confirmed with RQIA that no issues have arisen during the past year, to require RQIA to take enforcement action or to lead them to make recommendations within this area of day care provision.

Dental Practices

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to introducing legislation to regulate the intake of patients in dental practices, so that a suitable quota of Health Service patients are registered with each practice.

(AQW 6263/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently engaged with the British Dental Association over the development of a new contract for health service dentistry in Northern Ireland. Once implemented, this will give the Health and Social Care Board much greater control over how and where health service dentistry is provided. Consideration will be given to specifying patient quotas within the new contracts. I have no plans to legislate for patient quotas otherwise.

Delays for Hospital Treatment

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to ensure that patients are regularly informed when there will be long delays for their hospital treatment.

(AQW 6265/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An Integrated Elective Access Protocol was issued to Trusts in 2008 which sets out the arrangements to be followed when booking patients' appointments. This protocol includes a requirement to initially advise patients of the likely waiting time for assessment and / or treatment either in written correspondence or when patients telephone to book appointments where this service is available. Patients will be contacted again when an appointment has been made.

Obesity Strategy

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Obesity Strategy.

(AQW 6268/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is continuing the development of an Obesity Prevention Strategic Framework and I anticipate that this will go out for public consultation in summer 2010.

Orthodontist Services

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has for Orthodontist Services.

(AQW 6269/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently engaged with the British Dental Association over the development of new (separate) contracts for General Dental and Orthodontic services.

The proposed orthodontic contract includes the use of an index to identify those patients who need health service orthodontic treatment. This index is called the 'Index of Orthodontic Treatment Need'

(IOTN). The IOTN is widely used throughout the British Isles and is recognised by the British Orthodontic Society as a fair, objective and reliable assessment tool to identify treatment need.

Given the imperative to target resources at orthodontic need rather than patient demand, my officials have begun discussions with the BDA to introduce IOTN in advance of the new contracts.

Children's Health Services

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has allocated, this year, to (i) school-based children's individual health services; (ii) school-based children's group health services; and (iii) the Healthy Schools programme.

(AQW 6294/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care family provides a broad range of school based health services under the Child Health Promotion Programme. This includes universal services requiring contact to be made with each family to identify health need, using a holistic assessment which incorporates screening and surveillance. The universal programme within the school setting is delivered through HSC Trust school health services. Where school-aged children have additional health needs, targeted services are provided to support them in a range of settings which may include schools.

Prevention of Communicable Diseases

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department allocated to the prevention of communicable diseases (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 6296/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The prevention of communicable diseases is integral to a wide range of areas of policy and service delivery across Health and Social Care organisations and it is therefore not possible to calculate a figure for this funding without incurring disproportionate cost.

Public Health Agency

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of staff; and (ii) the average salary of an employee of the Public Health Agency.

(AQW 6297/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest information available shows that the PHA has 204 staff equating to 183.38 whole time equivalents.

It is not possible to provide a meaningful average salary cost for the PHA as staff fall into a range of separate terms and conditions groups which cover Agenda for Change, junior doctor rates, consultant rates and senior executives.

Public Health

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department allocated to public health in (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 6301/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: £70m was provided recurrently to the Public Health Agency in 2009/10 to fund all aspects of public health expenditure. The 2010/11 budget has yet to be finalised.

Tamiflu Tablets

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Tamiflu tablets are in stock.

(AQW 6308/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are currently 1.17 million courses of Tamiflu antiviral stockpiled in Northern Ireland to treat viral infections.

Physiotherapy Treatment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children with disabilities had their physiotherapy treatment (i) reduced; or (ii) withdrawn in each Health Trust, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6321/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mental Health (NI) Order 1986

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been detained under the Mental Health Act in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6329/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people who have been detained under the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986 is not available.

Child Protection Register

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children, per thousand child population, on the child protection register in each Health Trust area.

(AQW 6331/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is detailed in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF CHILDREN¹ ON THE CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER AT 31 MARCH 2009, PER 1000 CHILD POPULATION² BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUSTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

HSC Trust	Children per 1,000 child population on the Child Protection Register
Belfast	8.9
Northern	3.4
South Eastern	6.9
Southern	4.6
Western	6.0

1. A child is defined as a person under 18 years of age.
2. The population figures used are the latest available mid-year estimates for 2008, produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel for Northern Ireland.

Western Health and Social Services Trust

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the current number of staff employed within the Western Health and Social Services Trust, broken down by grade; and (ii) the number of staff who will be employed after the Review of Public Administration, broken down by grade.

(AQW 6333/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The current number of staff in the Western Health and Social Services Trust, by staff group, can be found in the Key Facts Workforce Bulletin on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm.

Information on the number of staff who will be employed after the Review of Public Administration, broken down by grade is not available

Cancelled Operations

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have had operations cancelled on more than (i) one; (ii) two; (iii) three; (iv) four; or (v) five or more occasions, in each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 6348/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients who have had operations cancelled on more than (i) one; (ii) two; (iii) three; (iv) four; or (v) five or more occasions is not collected centrally.

GPs Practising in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many GPs were practising in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area in (i) 2005; and (ii) in the most recent year for which figures are available.

(AQW 6351/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures provided by Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation show that in the area covered by the Western Health and Social Care Trust there were:

- i) 190 GPs practicing in April 2005;
- ii) 194 GPs practicing in April 2010.

Figures refer to headcount of unrestricted principals or equivalents, and salaried GPs. Other types of general practitioner, such as locums, assistants, and associates are not included.

Dentists in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dentists were practising in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area in (i) 2005; and (ii) in the most recent year for which figures are available.

(AQW 6352/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures provided by Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation show that in the area covered by the Western Health and Social Care Trust there were:

- i) 111 dentists registered to provide Health Service dental services in April 2005;
- ii) 142 dentists registered to provide Health Service dental services in April 2010. This figure includes 15 dentists employed by Oasis Dental Care Ltd under the new contract awarded by the Department in May 2009.

Figures refer to Principal dentists only; assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners are not included. Figures exclude those dentists working in the Community Dental Service and the Hospital Dental Service.

Myalgic Encephalopathy

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department's strategy on Myalgic Encephalopathy compares to other parts of the UK.

(AQW 6357/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department's strategy for the effective treatment and management of Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME) is based on the Department's link to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). While arrangements for the endorsement and implementation of NICE guidance in Northern Ireland differ from those that apply in England and Wales, my Department expects Health and Social Care Trusts to reflect NICE guidance on ME in the future planning and delivery of services for people diagnosed with this illness.

Myalgic Encephalopathy

Mr J Craig asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the processes in place, in each Health and Social Care Trust, in relation to Myalgic Encephalopathy (i) for diagnoses; (ii) to set up programmes of support and monitor the changing needs of patients; (iii) what support is given to the emotional and physical needs of patients; and (iv) what support is given to the family of patients.

(AQW 6358/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: People who have symptoms of Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME) typically consult their General Practitioner. Patients' needs are then assessed on an individual basis with subsequent onward referrals to treatment and services being made on their assessed need. Their ongoing needs and support are addressed through assessment, intervention and review. In addition, Health and Social Care professionals provide physical and emotional advice and support to patients as necessary. Furthermore, the needs of patients' families and carers also form part of the wider holistic assessment of patient need.

Myalgic Encephalopathy

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people are currently diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalopathy in each Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) what research is currently being carried out into the needs of people with Myalgic Encephalopathy.

(AQW 6359/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people currently diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME) is not available.

In Northern Ireland, the Research and Development Office promotes, co-ordinates, and supports research and development within the HSC. The R&D Office has received no applications for research projects involving ME and does not currently fund any research into ME

Daisy Hill Hospital Ambulance Service

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the response time of the front line ambulance service at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, since 5 April 2010.

(AQW 6366/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) measures the achievement of its emergency response performance targets on the basis of Local Commissioning Group (LCG) areas. Daisy Hill Hospital is situated in the Southern LCG area. Despite increased demand over the Easter period, NIAS has responded to 66.2% of the life-threatening calls received since 1 April 2010.

In pursuit of continuous improvement in the service provided to the public across Northern Ireland, NIAS closely monitors its emergency response performance. The ambulance service manages its resources on a daily basis to achieve the most efficient and effective means of addressing variations in demand.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) doctors; and (ii) nurses are routinely on duty, per shift, over a 24-hour period in the Accident and Emergency Units at (a) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (b) the Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 6383/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The minimum and maximum number of A&E staff on duty across the various shifts is:

Grade	Causeway		Antrim Area	
	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum
Doctors	4	1	9	2
Nurses	7	4	9	8

Source: Northern HSC Trust

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many patients, on average over a 24-hour period, attended the Accident and Emergency Units, at (a) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (b) the Antrim Area Hospital; and (ii) what is the average waiting time.

(AQW 6384/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The EC1 aggregate information return is collected monthly and records the number of patients that waited 0 to 4 hours, 4 to 12 hours, and greater than 12 hours in each A&E Departments across Northern Ireland. This information is published monthly and is available at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/emergency_care.htm

Information on the average waiting time for patients attending the Accident and Emergency Units, at (a) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (b) the Antrim Area Hospital is not collected centrally.

Information on the longest recorded waiting time for patients attending Accident and Emergency Units at (i) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (ii) the Antrim Area Hospital is not collected centrally.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the longest recorded waiting time in the Accident and Emergency Units at (i) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (ii) the Antrim Area Hospital in (a) 2008; (b) 2009; and (c) 2010 to date.

(AQW 6385/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The EC1 aggregate information return is collected monthly and records the number of patients that waited 0 to 4 hours, 4 to 12 hours, and greater than 12 hours in each A&E Departments across Northern Ireland. This information is published monthly and is available at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/emergency_care.htm

Information on the average waiting time for patients attending the Accident and Emergency Units, at (a) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (b) the Antrim Area Hospital is not collected centrally.

Information on the longest recorded waiting time for patients attending Accident and Emergency Units at (i) the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine; and (ii) the Antrim Area Hospital is not collected centrally.

Western Health and Social Services Board

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of staff employed in the former Western Health and Social Services Board prior to the establishment of the Health and Social Care Board; (ii) the number of staff currently employed by the Health and Social Care Board in the former Western Health and Social Services Board area; and (iii) the staffing complement for the Health and Social Care Board in the former Western Health and Social Services Board under current proposals, broken down by (a) grade; and (b) location.

(AQW 6387/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

(i) & (ii)

	Western HSSB		HSC BOARD(in the Western area)	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
31/03/09	232	200		
31/03/10			84	72.11

Notes: WTE = Whole-time Equivalent

1. It should be noted that staff in the former WHSSB transferred to either the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency, Business Services Organisation and Patient Client Council.
2. As at 31 March 2010 a further 17 former Western Health and Social Care Board staff (16.3 WTE) were working in the Western area for Cooperation and Working Together. (CAWT)
- (iii) The Health and Social Care Board advised that it is currently not possible to be definitive on proposed total staff at this time as this will depend on the outworking of the current process including engagement with trade unions, but they are committed to the maintenance of strong local offices, and to undertaking this process fairly and transparently as possible.

Western Health and Social Services Board

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Health and Social Care Board staff in the former Western Health and Social Services Board area who have been acting up to a higher grade for more than two years, broken down by grade and the number of years at the higher grade.

(AQW 6388/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

STAFF ACTING UP WITHIN THE FORMER WHSSB FOR MORE THAN 2 YEARS

Grade	HC	WTE	Higher Grade	HC	WTE	Time Period
3	1	1	5	1	1	4 years
4	1	1	SM2	1	1	6 years
5	1	1	SM2	1	1	4 years

Grade	HC	WTE	Higher Grade	HC	WTE	Time Period
6	1	1	7	1	1	2 years
6	1	1	7	1	1	2 years
6	1	1	7	1	1	2 years
8A	1	1	8C	1	1	2 years

People with Asthma

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to providing 24-hour access to primary care as first point of contact for people with asthma.

(AQW 6406/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the General Medical Services Contract, 24 hour access to primary care is available to people with asthma through their GP practice or their local Out of Hours Service Provider.

Personal Asthma Action Plan

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to providing a personal asthma action plan for all people the condition.

(AQW 6407/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the provisions of the General Medical Services (GMS) Contract, a Directed Enhanced Service (DES) has been put in place for people with long term conditions, including patients with asthma. The DES requires GP practices to provide asthma patients, aged 15 and over, with mild persistent asthma and above that level, with a written self-management plan and a patient held asthma action plan on an annual basis. Patients should contribute to their own written plans over time. For asthma patients under 15 years of age, the GP practice will provide the child or parent (as appropriate) with the action plan.

Pollution from the George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to carrying out a study on the health implications of the pollution from the George Best Belfast City Airport for residents in South and East Belfast.

(AQW 6441/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I share the concerns that were raised by the former Eastern Health and Social Services Board with Planning Service in relation to potential health impacts regarding the proposed extension of the runway at Belfast City Airport and welcome the Health Impact Assessment that has been commissioned into this development.

I also support the Public Enquiry into this application which was announced by Minister Poots on the 16 March 2010.

Hospital Car Parking Charges

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the car parking charges at each hospital.

(AQW 6458/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Public charges for car parking are as follows:

Charge Bands	Belfast City £	Mater £	Royal £	Ulster £	Craigavon £	Altna-gelvin £	Daisy Hill £
Up to 1 hour	1.00	1.00	1.20	1.20	0.50	0.60	0.50
1-2 hours	1.50	1.00	1.20	1.80	1.00	1.20	1.00
2-3 hours	2.00	1.00	1.20	1.80	1.50	1.80	1.50
3-4 hours	2.50	1.00	1.20	1.80	2.00	2.40	2.00
4-5 hours	4.50	1.00	2.00	2.50	2.50	3.00 and 4.80	2.50
5-6 hours	7.50	1.00	2.00	2.50	2.50	3.60 and 7.20	2.50
Over 6 hrs	10.00	1.00	4.10	3.50	3.50	4.20, 4.80 and 9.60	3.50
8-24 hours	10.00	1.00	4.10	4.50	4.50	6.00 and 12.00	4.50

If a hospital is not listed, there is no charging in place. Craigavon, Daisy Hill and Altnagelvin offer some free car parking on site. After 4 hours, Altnagelvin charges different rates for different parking areas.

Staff charges for car parking are as follows:

Hospital	Annual charge (note part time staff pay less)
Royal	Sliding scale up to £206
Belfast City	£78
Mater	£100 (£200 for a more convenient car park)
Ulster	£132

Altnagelvin, Craigavon and Daisy Hill do not charge staff for car parking.

Waiting Lists

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the difference between a 'planned waiting list' and an 'elective waiting list'.

(AQW 6497/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The term "planned" is used for patients who are waiting to be recalled to hospital as part of a planned sequence of care determined on clinical criteria. It is typically used when treatment may be required some months or years hence, perhaps because clinicians must await the physical development of a child or young person or because of other factors affecting a person's care and treatment.

The term "elective" is used for patients for whom a clinician has determined that a treatment is required and need not await other clinical considerations and which of course the clinician and patient concerned have decided should proceed.

Review of Maternity Services

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the review of maternity services.

(AQW 6537/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I announced the review on 2 April, the project board has been established and will meet on 19 May to agree the Terms of Reference and begin the review in detail. The joint chairs of the review are Professor Cathy Warwick, General Secretary of the Royal College of Midwives and Dr Paul Fogarty who is a consultant obstetrician at the Ulster Hospital and Chairman of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecology

Department of Justice

DOJ: Staff Payments

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Justice how many staff employed by (i) what is now the Department of Justice; (ii) the Northern Ireland Court Service; (iii) the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and (iv) the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission received payments in addition to their basic salary in (a) 2008; and (b) 2009; and to indicate the amount of each payment and the grades of the staff involved.

(AQW 6102/10)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): The Department of Justice came into existence on 12th April 2010. Details of payments made to staff before that date are a matter for the previous departments. Similar information to that requested is publicly available for staff employed by the Northern Ireland Office for 2008 and 2009 in Hansard (House of Lords references: 5 Jan 2010 : Column WA65; 11 Mar 2010 : WA104 and House of Commons reference 1 Feb 2010 : Column 4W). I can further advise that previous salary information in relation to NIO Board Members is also available publicly in the annual NIO Resource Accounts by accessing the NIO website www.nio.gov.uk. Salary information in relation to NI Court Service Board Members in the financial year 2008/09 is included in the Resource Accounts for the NI Court Service available on the NI Courts and Tribunals Service website at www.courtsni.gov.uk.

Requests for information on payments made to staff in the NI Court Service and NI Legal Services Commission in 2008 and 2009 is the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor.

Diesel Dipping

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of 'diesel dipping' operations launched by the PSNI in each of the last 5 years; (ii) the number of vehicles that were found to be using illegal fuel during these operations; (iii) the number of arrests made; and (iv) the outcome of any prosecutions.

(AQW 6288/10)

Minister of Justice : Responsibility for tackling excise fraud is a reserved matter that rests with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and not with the PSNI. As HMRC is accountable to Her Majesty's Treasury, I have forwarded this question to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury who will reply on this matter.

Sentences for Sex Crimes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice if he has any plans to increase sentences for sex crimes.
(AQW 6323/10)

Minister of Justice : I have no plans to increase sentences at this time.

A full review of the law on sexual offences was carried out prior to the introduction last year of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008. This review looked at the sentences available for all sexual offences and recommended substantial increases, following changes in England & Wales, along with a new framework of offences, including many more offences carrying a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

I plan to review the operation of the new legislation in due course, once sufficient statistical evidence is available to make it meaningful.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Justice what procedures are in place in Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland to ensure that staff appointed to handle finance do not have criminal convictions for fraud.

(AQW 6365/10)

Minister of Justice : Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland operates independently of the Department of Justice. I am advised by Dr Michael Maguire, the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice that Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland initiates a criminal record check with Access NI to ensure that staff appointed to handle finance do not have criminal convictions for fraud.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for antisocial behaviour in the East Antrim constituency in each of the last two years.

(AQW 6378/10)

Minister of Justice : It is not possible to provide information on convictions for antisocial behaviour as convictions are only secured as a result of a criminal offence being committed and antisocial behaviour is not a criminal offence.

Information is however available in respect of the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued by District Council area. The information is not held by constituency.

The Department of Justice has been notified by the relevant authorities that there were 32 ASBOs issued in Northern Ireland in 2008 and 25 ASBOs issued in Northern Ireland in 2009. The table below details the breakdown of these figures by District Council area.

ASBOs Issued by District Councils 2008 and 2009

District Council	2008	2009
Antrim	0	2
Armagh	0	1
Ballymena	17	5
Belfast	2	5
Carrickfergus	0	1
Castlereagh	0	1
Coleraine	1	4
Craigavon	0	3
Down	1	0
Larne	2	0

District Council	2008	2009
Lisburn	1	0
Newry	4	1
Newtownabbey	3	1
North Down	0	1
Strabane	1	0
Total	32	25

Notes

The Anti-social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 defines relevant authority as district councils, PSNI or Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

DOJ: Budget

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail his total budget for the 2010/11 financial year. **(AQW 6392/10)**

Minister of Justice : Details of the total 2010/11 budget for the Department of Justice are included within the Department's 2010/11 Main Estimate. This was laid in the Assembly on 22 March 2010.

A copy of this is available in the Assembly library. The full title is; Northern Ireland Estimates 2010-2011 for

- Department of Justice;
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister; and
- Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.

Police Reserves

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Justice if there are any plans to retain the police reserves in light of the increased dissident republican activity. **(AQW 6466/10)**

Minister of Justice : Decisions about the future of the Full Time Reserve are a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

PSNI's Stop and Search Powers

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the PSNI's current use of stop and search powers. **(AQW 6475/10)**

Minister of Justice : The provision of powers for police to stop and search under the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 is a necessary measure in the detection and prevention of crime. PACE Code A regulates the exercise of these powers and provides important safeguards and protection for members of the public.

Measures of accountability and transparency are in place for the monitoring and scrutiny of appropriate exercise of these powers. Police must record particulars for each person or vehicle stop and search and make that record available to the person searched. PSNI publish quarterly reports on the number

of persons stopped, searched, questioned and arrested under the relevant powers. The latest publications can be accessed at - http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_stop_and_search_statistics.htm

Instances of stop and search are a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board which closely monitors and scrutinises the usage of police stop and search powers.

Assaults Against Pregnant Women

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice how many violent assaults against pregnant women have been recorded by the PSNI in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 6498/10)

Minister of Justice : Statistics on recorded crime are collected by PSNI. I have therefore forwarded this question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Assaults on Prison Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prison staff have been assaulted in each prison in each of the last three years; and how many of these assaults were regarded as serious.

(AQW 6503/10)

Minister of Justice : The table below shows the total number of prison staff assaulted in each prison in each of the last three years including, in brackets, those recorded as serious assaults.

Financial Year	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank
2007-08	28(21)	7(6)	9(1)
2008-09	21(10)	3(1)	17(3)
2009-10	30(14)	8(0)	15(5)

Foreign Nationals Serving Prison Sentences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many foreign nationals have been (i) deported; and (ii) recommended for deportation after serving prison sentences, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6507/10)

Minister of Justice : According to statistics recorded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in the last 3 years, 31 foreign national prisoners have been recommended by the courts for deportation after serving a sentence. The figures are as follows:

Year	Numbers recommended for deportation
2007	3
2008	12
2009	16

Of these, 9 remain in custody and 22 have completed their sentences. Of the latter, 20 have transferred to the custody of the UK Borders Agency. One successfully appealed deportation and one has voluntarily returned to their home country.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold information on whether or not individuals are deported by the UK Borders Agency.

Department for Regional Development

NI Water

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development how much investment will be required by NI Water over the next (i) 10 years; and (ii) 20 years to enable it to meet European standards.

(AQW 6349/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it estimates capital investment in the region of £750 million will be required over the next 10 years, and £900 million over the subsequent 10 years, to meet European Union standards for water and wastewater treatment. This includes investment to maintain and, where necessary, achieve current EU standards and to comply with future EU standards which are known about, but excludes the capital cost of maintaining the existing assets, providing enhanced service levels for customers or extending the water and sewerage systems to cater for increases in demand resulting from development growth. In addition, it is not yet known what impact some of the more recently introduced EU standards, such as the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive, will have on the cost of providing water and wastewater services.

NI Water

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development how much NI Water has spent in each local Council area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6350/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that in many cases capital projects cross Council boundaries and it is not possible to apportion expenditure to individual Council areas. The tables below provide details of total expenditure on capital infrastructure projects by local Council areas in the last 3 years, where it relates solely to individual Council areas. It also provides total expenditure in each of the 3 years for other projects which cross more than one Council area.

WATER

Council	2007/08 £000's	2008/09 £000's	2009/10 £000's
Antrim	925	1,107	1,171
Ards	3,013	3,520	6,076
Armagh	7,347	6,100	3,350
Ballymena	3,217	2,399	3,969
Ballymoney	3,119	1,069	1,999
Banbridge	1,486	2,795	189
Belfast	4,939	1,057	9,602
Carrickfergus	30	16	552
Castlereagh	2,701	1,305	0
Coleraine	395	40	1,929
Cookstown	5,071	1,276	144
Craigavon	1,057	3,968	453
Derry	1,102	1,997	5,788
Down	1,619	72	4,354

Council	2007/08 £000's	2008/09 £000's	2009/10 £000's
Dungannon	652	3,255	2,811
Fermanagh	681	638	209
Larne	41	108	125
Limavady	485	1,772	1,758
Lisburn	385	701	1,570
Magherafelt	237	184	28
Moyle	5	9	3,276
Newry & Mourne	2,641	1,364	495
Newtownabbey	842	1,703	1,592
North Down	712	3,830	34
Omagh	900	2,035	2,930
Strabane	719	5,737	754
More than one Council Area	15,391	19,401	22,136
	59,712	67,458	77,294

SEWERAGE

Council	2007/08 £000's	2008/09 £000's	2009/10 £000's
Antrim	8,673	11,210	6,763
Ards	4,219	10,235	7,886
Armagh	5,647	3,591	2,732
Ballymena	375	298	1,325
Ballymoney	2,495	2,124	2,021
Banbridge	5,606	2,864	811
Belfast	58,241	52,308	27,047
Carrickfergus	38	4	226
Castlereagh	638	335	1,262
Coleraine	12,849	728	1,063
Cookstown	778	1,401	2,821
Craigavon	2,277	2,249	2,967
Derry	7,629	8,978	7,334
Down	5,959	14,524	12,651
Dungannon	2,247	4,363	9,438
Fermanagh	10,480	10,400	2,249

Larne	873	156	1,247
Limavady	2,595	4,263	4,647
Lisburn	2,499	8,211	6,811
Magherafelt	1,660	3,439	6,044
Moyle	450	2,238	6,425
Newry & Mourne	8,236	5,269	5,408
Newtownabbey	2,280	663	886
North Down	1,495	4,463	4,230
Omagh	1,765	533	507
Strabane	2,537	2,091	866
More than one Council Area	2,992	2,898	11,543
	155,533	159,836	137,210

Payments for NI Water Services

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what arrangements are in place to ensure that payments for NI Water services, such as the emptying of septic tanks in emergencies, can be made by debit or credit card to avoid unnecessary delays, such as the clearing of cheques.

(AQW 6363/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, at present, payment of bills for water and sewerage services can be made by debit or credit card but this facility has not yet been extended to miscellaneous services such as septic tank desludging. As part of its commitment to improving services to customers, NIW has undertaken to consider if arrangements can be put in place for payment by debit or credit card for emergency septic tank desludging.

Translink Train Set

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of modifications to the 'drive carriages' of the train set Translink bought from the Gatwick Express to enable the train set to be used for active service.

(AQW 6368/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that the information you have requested relates to contracts Translink have entered into with other commercial organisations and which are bound by confidentiality. Furthermore, the information has implications for the commercial interests of Translink. I therefore am not in a position to disclose this information.

I should point out that in making decisions relating to the deployment of trains, Translink take account of the current pressures on resource and capital funding.

Translink Train Set

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much Translink spent on purchasing a train set from the Gatwick Express; (ii) when it made this purchase; and (iii) to detail the cost of refurbishing the train set at the railway works in Derby.

(AQW 6369/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink take the view that the information which you have requested relates to contracts Translink has entered into with other commercial organisations which are bound by confidentiality. Furthermore, the information has implications for the commercial interests of the organisation. I therefore am not in a position to disclose this information.

I should point out that in making decisions relating to the deployment of trains, Translink take account of the current pressures on resource and capital funding.

Translink Train Set

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the train set Translink purchased from the Gatwick Express, to detail (i) Translink's usage of the train set since its purchase; (ii) planned use for this train set; (iii) the current location of the train set and if there are any plans to move it to a new location; and for his assessment of the security of any proposed new location.
(AQW 6370/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that following its purchase in 2001 and subsequent commissioning, the Gatwick train set was used to supplement peak commuter capacity from Portadown to Belfast. Whilst it is no longer used in this capacity, this rolling stock provides network backup and remains an integral part of Translink's operational fleet.

In relation to its location, the Gatwick's are stabled at both the Fortwilliam train maintenance facility and Lisburn rail yard, both of which are considered as secure facilities.

Road Maintenance Schemes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent, per head of population, on road maintenance schemes in the West Belfast constituency compared to the Strangford constituency in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6448/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not hold the information you request by head of population, or on a parliamentary constituency basis.

Roads at Bushforde and Bush Manor, Antrim

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on accessing the road bonds to complete and adopt the roads at Bushforde and Bush Manor in Antrim; and to detail if legal proceedings will commence against the developer or administrators.
(AQW 6565/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service understands that the two developments, to which you refer, are to be known as Bush Manor, and it has asked Antrim Borough Council to supply and erect the street name signs.

Roads Service adopted the part of development adjacent to the Stiles Way/Steeple Road crossroads on 24 March 2010. However, the streets within the development to the north east are incomplete and have not been adopted.

As the developer, Eassda, is in administration, Roads Service officials are currently compiling a list of carriageway defects, such as pot holes, to enable repairs to be carried out and allow the safe movement of traffic and pedestrians. It is hoped that this work will be carried out in the very near future.

In addition, Roads Service officials are preparing a list of work required to bring roads, street lighting and sewers to the standard required for adoption. This may include work to strengthen a retaining wall along the front of the site, as well as providing final surfacing to roads and footways.

Roads Service is making every effort to arrange for the required remedial works to be undertaken as soon as possible.

With regard to legal proceedings, Roads Service considers that there will be sufficient funds within the Developer's road bond to complete the outstanding works. However, should the Developer or Administrator default, Roads Service will issue a legal notice under Article 11 of the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 14 May 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Senior Civil Service

Mrs C McGill asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an estimate of the annual efficiency savings from rationalising the senior civil service grades within their Department.

(AQO 1179/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): In Budget 2008-11, the Executive agreed that departments would deliver 5% per annum administration efficiency savings over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11. OFMDFM is required to deliver £2 million in efficiency savings across the three years.

These measures will result in a reduction of approximately 51 full time equivalent posts across all grades, including the senior civil service. We estimate that annual efficiency savings of over £320,000 will be achieved through rationalisation of the senior civil service in the Department.

Parades Working Group

Mr D McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how the sectarian harassment aspects of the Parades Working Group proposals would operate in practice.

(AQO 1180/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The consultation on the draft Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests Bill (Northern Ireland) began on 20 April and will run for 12 weeks until 14 July. The draft Bill was informed by the report of the Working Group on Parades and details the proposals for the future handling of all issues related to public assemblies, including parades and protests, and the new structures that will be created. Determining how any element of the proposals will work in practice can only be decided once the consultation is complete especially as it is possible for aspects of the draft document to change significantly following analysis of the responses received.

St Andrews Agreement: Working Group

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the working group set up to address outstanding issues from the St. Andrew's Agreement.

(AQO 1181/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: As part of the implementation of the commitments made in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, the Executive agreed on 11 February to establish a Working Group to identify all matters contained in the St Andrews Agreement which had not been faithfully implemented or actioned, and to make recommendations on how progress could be made on those matters which had not been actioned.

This Working Group has not yet met pending the completion of necessary preliminary consultation with the other parties in the Executive on a schedule which we prepared showing each commitment and our respective assessments of its current status.

We have recently received responses from all three parties which we are currently considering. We hope to convene a meeting of the Working Group under the joint chairmanship of the OFMDFM Junior Ministers in the near future.

Reorganisation

Mr A Maginness asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many jobs will be lost as part of the re-organisation of their Department and at what grades; and whether senior civil service posts will be protected.

(AQO 1182/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In Budget 2008-11, the Executive agreed that departments would deliver 5% per annum administration efficiency savings over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11. OFMDFM is required to deliver £2 million in efficiency savings across the three years.

These measures will result in a reduction of approximately 51 full time equivalent posts.

These posts cover grades from Administrative Assistant up to and including Senior Civil Service posts, which are not protected in any way.

The objective is to redeploy staff within the Civil Service and suppress vacancies rather than making staff redundant or unemployed.

Our aim was to complete this exercise as far as possible by 1 April 2010. To date we have been able to implement 90% of the required reductions and the remainder will be achieved very soon.

The Department is engaging with Trade Union Side in taking this work forward.

North/South Ministerial Council

Mr C Boylan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of permanent headquarters for the North South Ministerial Council.

(AQO 1183/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Construction work on the permanent accommodation for the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat was completed ahead of schedule on 26 February 2010 and the offices have been fully operational since 19 April 2010.

Savings Target

Mr D Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what portion of the original £11.1m savings target set for their Department in 2008 for the current Comprehensive Spending Review period has been realised to date.

(AQO 1184/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In 2008-09 the Department achieved its target efficiencies of £2.35 million in full.

In the first six months of 2009-10, OFMDFM achieved £3.53 million of efficiency savings equivalent to 76% of the target of £4.63 million for the full 2009-10 year. This is 4% higher than the average across all departments of 72%.

At the mid-point of the three-year Budget 2008-11 period, OFMDFM had delivered a total of £5.88 million of efficiencies, or 53.0% of its CSR efficiency target of £11.1 million.

Data on the efficiency savings achieved by OFMDFM for the 2009/10 financial year is currently being collated.

Civil Contingencies Policy Branch

Mr M Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch.

(AQO 1186/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The role of the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch, OFMDFM, is to promote the development and delivery of effective civil contingencies arrangements here. To deliver this, Civil Contingencies Policy Branch (CCPB) formulates cross-cutting policy on emergency preparedness and resilience; facilitates co-ordination of the response to emergencies having a major impact here; and represents our civil contingencies interests at UK level.

CCPB works closely with key stakeholder organisations in emergency preparedness and response to encourage adoption of best practice and co-ordination of approach. This is achieved by facilitation of the work of the Civil Contingencies Group, the membership of which includes all departments, the emergency services and district council representation. In addition, CCPB plays an active role in the work of a range of emergency preparedness groups including the Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG), and has been involved in the development and implementation of the 'LGEMG Emergency Planning Strategy 2009-2014'.

During the past year, CCPB played a pivotal role in the non-health response to the swine flu pandemic both here and elsewhere in the UK. CCPB ensured that non-health organisations received the information they needed to prepare to deal with the impacts of the pandemic on their own services and their sectors. Currently the Branch is actively engaged in reviews of the response to the pandemic both here and elsewhere in the UK. The outcome of these reviews will inform an update of the Strategy for the non-health aspects of Pandemic Influenza.

Following the extensive flooding in Fermanagh during November 2009, OFMDFM led a cross-departmental Taskforce, established by the Executive, to identify lessons learned and measures to mitigate the impact of future flooding. CCPB facilitated the work of the Taskforce, including an extensive evidence gathering phase. The Branch continues to work with stakeholder departments and agencies to evaluate the evidence provided and to produce recommendations for consideration by the Executive. The outcome from this initiative will also inform the wider ongoing work on flood mitigation and response.

Most recently CCPB has been engaged in monitoring and assessing the impact of the Icelandic volcanic ash plume, and has shared information on the ongoing risk of further disruption with relevant organisations here. This work has involved liaison with a UK-level emergency committee and with the Office of Emergency Planning in Dublin. It is anticipated that this immediate response work will be followed up with more formalised contingency planning for the ongoing eruption.

British-Irish Council

Miss M McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in establishing a standing secretariat for the British-Irish Council.

(AQO 1187/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The establishment of a standing secretariat for the British Irish Council (the Council) has been discussed as one element of the BIC Strategic Review at recent BIC Summit meetings.

The core functions, staffing profiles, secondment arrangements and legal framework for the standing secretariat have been endorsed by the Council.

It is expected that a decision on location will be taken at the next BIC Summit in Guernsey in June.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Single Farm Payment applications were unsuccessful in each constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6561/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): To date, 329 applications to the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme have been determined as unsuccessful with no payment due. The numbers for scheme years 2008 and 2007 were 270 and 309 respectively.

The Department does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total numbers of unsuccessful applications received for years 2007, 2008 and 2009, as at 30 April 2010, for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

ANNEX A

UNSUCCESSFUL CLAIMS TO SINGLE FARM PAYMENT 2007 TO 2009 (BY POSTCODE)

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT1	0	0	3
BT2	0	0	0
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	1	0	2
BT5	0	0	0
BT6	0	0	0
BT7	0	0	0
BT8	2	3	2
BT9	1	0	1
BT10	0	0	0
BT11	0	0	0
BT12	0	0	1
BT13	0	0	0
BT14	1	1	1
BT15	1	0	0
BT16	1	2	0
BT17	0	0	0
BT18	0	0	0
BT19	1	0	0
BT20	2	1	0
BT21	0	0	0
BT22	4	1	1

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT23	12	3	7
BT24	4	5	7
BT25	3	2	7
BT26	1	0	1
BT27	5	3	2
BT28	4	4	6
BT29	2	3	5
BT30	7	4	10
BT31	1	0	0
BT32	2	4	7
BT33	1	0	0
BT34	18	10	12
BT35	10	12	14
BT36	0	0	0
BT37	0	0	1
BT38	1	0	1
BT39	8	2	2
BT40	3	3	1
BT41	4	3	3
BT42	11	6	4
BT43	1	2	4
BT44	10	7	6
BT45	7	7	3
BT46	5	4	4
BT47	8	8	11
BT48	1	0	1
BT49	8	6	4
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	7	9	10
BT52	3	1	0
BT53	5	7	7
BT54	0	0	1
BT55	0	0	0
BT56	5	1	1

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT57	0	0	0
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	4	7	9
BT61	1	5	6
BT62	8	11	3
BT63	3	4	1
BT64	0	0	0
BT65	1	0	0
BT66	6	6	4
BT67	2	1	1
BT68	0	1	1
BT69	3	3	1
BT70	11	8	10
BT71	15	8	13
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	8	7	17
BT75	2	3	5
BT76	0	2	2
BT77	2	2	3
BT78	12	14	21
BT79	16	10	12
BT80	8	8	9
BT81	5	3	5
BT82	4	4	6
BT83	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0
BT86	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT91	0	0	0
BT92	6	16	17
BT93	5	7	14
BT94	5	8	9
No BT Postcode Held	11	8	7
Totals	309	270	329

Farms with Incinerators

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms in each constituency have an incinerator on-site.

(AQW 6607/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have provided in the attached table the number of on-farm animal carcase incinerators currently approved under the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 by constituency.

NUMBER OF APPROVED ON-FARM INCINERATORS IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND BY CONSTITUENCY AREA

Constituency area	Number of on-farm incinerators
Belfast East	0
Belfast North	0
Belfast South	0
Belfast West	0
East Antrim	1
North Antrim	7
South Antrim	1
North Down	0
South Down	6
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	21
Foyle	1
Lagan Valley	2
East Londonderry	3
Mid Ulster	13
Newry and Armagh	14
Strangford	2
West Tyrone	15
Upper Bann	0

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Maintenance of Libraries

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much his Department spent on the maintenance of libraries in the Belfast Education and Library Board area, in each of the last five years; and for a breakdown for each library.

(AQW 6434/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The following table shows maintenance expenditure on libraries in the Belfast Education and Library Board area for the last five years.

Library	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10
Andersonstown	1,559	927	6,133	5,537	140
Ardoyne	1,687	3,420	6,935	4,300	3,639
Ballyhackamore	4,485	6,945	3,883	13,343	2,582
Ballymacarrett	2,763	810	1,949	5,715	919
Belfast Central Library	52,329	68,217	28,128	75,333	39,253
Chichester	3,139	2,833	5,197	6,492	22,003
Falls Road	5,464	5,049	20,030	9,295	10,749
Finaghy	731	2,196	4,520	14,556	1,421
Hollywood Road	2,354	4,963	3,194	7,498	406
Ligoniel	3,792	882	2,137	4,422	960
Lisburn Road	6,483	7,473	2,501	14,240	1,323
Oldpark	3,605	38,231	2,286	4,210	1,634
Ormeau	2,174	2,671	5,689	5,936	167
Sandy Row	311	498	1,648	2,638	240
Shankill	7,392	-399	3,859	10,971	368
*Skegoniel	3,063	1,756	1,161	3,414	
Suffolk	1,490	1,231	6,484	7,067	17,342
Whiterock	3,038	-1,052	3,736	11,114	2,576
Whitewell	117	85	900	1,362	872
Woodstock	4,024	11,766	6,784	15,136	784
Grove Wellbeing Centre				129	159
Total	110,000	158,502	117,154	222,708	107,537

* Skegoniel Library Closed in May 2008 and relocated to the Grove Wellbeing Centre.

The Chief Executive of BELB has advised me of the spend attributed to each branch library under his control as Accounting Officer in the period required.

The Accounts for Libraries NI have not yet been finalised and audited. These draft figures may be subject to adjustment.

Maintenance of Libraries

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent on maintenance at each of the Belfast Education and Library Board libraries since the establishment of Libraries NI. **(AQW 6453/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Libraries NI assumed responsibility for the Public Library Service on 1 April 2009.

The following table shows Libraries NI maintenance expenditure on premises in the Belfast Education and Library Board area.

Library	2009/10 (£)
Andersonstown	140
Ardoyne	3,639
Ballyhackamore	2,582
Ballymacarrett	919
Belfast Central Library	39,253
Chichester	22,003
Falls Road	10,749
Finaghy	1,421
Hollywood Road	406
Ligoniel	960
Lisburn Road	1,323
Oldpark	1,634
Ormeau	167
Sandy Row	240
Shankill	368
Suffolk	17,342
Whiterock	2,576
Whitewell	872
Woodstock	784
Grove Wellbeing Centre	159
Total	107,537

The 2009/10 Accounts for Libraries NI have not yet been finalised and audited. These draft figures may be subject to adjustment.

Libraries NI

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the total annual cost of providing the Libraries NI library service for the 2009/10 financial year; and for a breakdown of the running cost of each library by cost code.

(AQW 6455/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The total annual net cost of providing the Libraries NI library service for the 2009/10 financial year was £42,547,000. This is a provisional figure that does not yet include a pension adjustment and is also subject to final audit. This amount is made up of:

Resource / DEL	Capital / DEL	Non-cash / AME	Total
£33,005k	£3,973k	£5,569k	£42,547k

A breakdown of the provisional running cost of each library by cost code is available in the Assembly Library.

Tony McCoy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would issue a statement congratulating Tony McCoy on his Grand National win.

(AQW 6562/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of Tony McCoy's win at the 2010 Grand National at Aintree on 10th April 2010. I wrote to Tony on 13 April 2010 to congratulate him on his achievement. A copy of my letter is attached.

Dear Tony,

I was delighted to hear of your success in winning the Grand National at Aintree on 10 April 2010.

To have finally won the Grand National at the 15th attempt is testament to your dedication, determination and resolve in the face of strong opposition and personal injury. Your achievement is one of which you and your family can be justifiably proud.

I should like to take this opportunity to convey my warmest congratulations on this your most recent achievement and to wish you every success for the future.

Nelson McCausland MLA

Minister of Culture Arts & Leisure

Department of Education

Schools in the Intervention Process

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how many schools are currently in the intervention process, broken down by (i) sector; and (ii) Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 6278/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): The school improvement policy I published last year sets out a clear commitment to ensure that all our young people receive a high quality education.

I gcásanna ina meastar go bhfuil scoileanna, tar éis iniúchta, níos lú ná sásúil, cuirtear iad anois i bpróiseas foirmeálta idirghabhála lena chinntiú go bhfaigheann siad an tacaíocht chuí a bhfuil de dhíth orthu óna mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOL) áitiúil, trína bheith ag obair i gcomhpháirtíocht le heagraíochtaí tacaíochta eile, chun feabhsúchán a sholáthar.

Where schools are found, following inspection, to be less than satisfactory, they are now placed in a formal intervention process designed to ensure they receive the tailored support they need from their local ELB, working in partnership as appropriate with other support bodies, to deliver improvement.

The tables below provide a breakdown by sector and by ELB of the schools currently receiving that tailored support.

BREAKDOWN BY SECTOR

Sector	Controlled ¹	Catholic Maintained	Integrated (including Controlled Integrated)	Other Maintained - Irish-medium
Number	8	2	2	6

Note 1: includes controlled Irish-medium

BREAKDOWN BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (ELB) AREA

ELB Area	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
Number	6	4	3	1	4

Schools in the Intervention Process

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how many schools have been placed in the intervention process, broken down by (i) sector; and (ii) Education and Library Board area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6328/10)

Minister of Education: The formal intervention process was introduced as part of the school improvement policy I published last April and therefore has only been in operation from the 2009/10 year.

Is é is aidhm leis an phróiseas foirmeálta idirghabhála ná a chinntiú go bhfaigheann scoileanna an tacaíocht chuí a bhfuil de dhíth orthu óna mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOL) áitiúil, trína bheith ag obair i gcomhpháirtíocht le heagraíochtaí tacaíochta eile, chun feabhsúchán a sholáthar.

The formal intervention process is designed to ensure that schools receive the tailored support they need from their local Education & Library Board (ELB), working in partnership as appropriate with other support bodies, to deliver improvement.

The tables below provide a breakdown by sector and by ELB area of the schools placed in the formal intervention process in 2009/10.

2009/10 - BREAKDOWN BY SECTOR

Sector	Controlled ¹	Catholic Maintained	Integrated (including Controlled Integrated)	Other Maintained - Irish-medium
Number	8	2	2	6

Note 1: includes controlled Irish-medium

2009/10 - BREAKDOWN BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (ELB) AREA

ELB Area	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
Number	6	4	3	1	4

Job Evaluations within the Education and Library Boards

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education whether she intends to lift the moratorium on job evaluations within the Education and Library Boards, given the delay in establishing the Education and Skills Authority structure.

(AQW 6337/10)

Minister of Education: Is fios do gach duine an mhoill atá ar bhunú ESA, ach geallaim duit go bhfuil a chruthú fós ina phríomhthosaíocht don Choiste Feidmhiúcháin agus go bhfuil dul chun cinn á dhéanamh tríd an Phlean Soláthair Choinbhéirseachta chun soláthar éifeachtach seirbhísí a chinntiú le linn na hidirthréimhse.

The delay in the establishment of ESA is well known however I can assure you that its creation remains an Executive priority and progress is being made through the Convergence Delivery Plan to ensure the efficient delivery of services in this transitional period.

With regard to the moratorium on job evaluations, this is applicable only to all new and re-evaluations and does not affect any evaluations already in the queue as part of the original job evaluation agreement. To this end therefore the priority for the Education & Library Boards is to complete all current outstanding job evaluations.

Furthermore, as you may be aware a 'Review on Job Evaluation in the Education & Library Boards' has been completed which includes recommendations on the most appropriate way forward, both in the interim period and for the longer term once ESA is established. You will appreciate however that the agreement of all parties, through the Joint Negotiating Council, to any proposed way forward is essential.

To conclude, therefore, once all current outstanding job evaluations are completed and the way forward agreed by all relevant parties the position regarding the moratorium will be reviewed.

Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail (a) her Department's investment; and (b) all other investment in the Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments in each of the last three years; and (ii) for an estimate of the capital expenditure in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 6379/10)

Minister of Education: Ní mhaoiníonn an Roinn Oideachais (RO) aon scoil speisialta go díreach. Leithdháiltear ar Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) an chuid is mó den chistiú d'oideachas speisialta mar chistiú nár cuireadh in áirithe, agus cineann na BOLanna úsáid an chistithe seo mar chuid dá gcinntí blaintúla ar leithdháileadh a mblocdheontais. Tá buiséid leatharmhligthe ag scoileanna speisialta, agus coinníonn na BOLanna féin gach costas atá bainteach le daltaí.

The Department of Education (DE) does not directly fund any special school.

The bulk of funding for special education is allocated to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) as non-earmarked funding, the deployment of which is determined by the ELBs as part of their annual decisions about the allocation of their block grant. Special schools have partially delegated budgets, with all pupil related costs being retained centrally by the ELBs.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board that delegated and non-delegated budgets in respect of Jordanstown Schools in each of the last three financial years is as follows:-

2007/08	Budget	Expend	Balance
Delegated Budget	134,011	118,472	15,539
Non Delegated Budget			
Staffing	1,066,787	1,105,840	-39,053
Non Staffing	44,088	61,368	-17,280
	1,110,875	1,167,208	-56,333

2008/09	Budget	Expend	Balance
Delegated Budget	138,591	132,070	6,521
Non Delegated Budget			
Staffing	1,146,460	1,107,871	38,589
Non Staffing	64,769	44,512	20,257
	1,211,229	1,152,383	58,846

2009/10	Budget	Expend	Balance
Delegated Budget	147,115	130,967	16,148
Non Delegated Budget			
Staffing	1,186,449	1,164,093	22,356
Non Staffing	51,614	28,275	23,339
	1,238,063	1,192,368	45,695

Jordanstown Schools had approached DE about the possibility of accessing capital funding for the new build, but the school authorities were advised that any potential contribution from government funds would require strict compliance with guidance on tender procedures which would have involved publishing an invitation to tender via the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). As the school authorities acted independently and as the project was not taken forward as part of the DE's capital allocation process, no capital funding can be made available in 2010/11 or subsequent financial years.

New School Building for Young People with Visual Impairments

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the total investment in the new school building for young people with visual impairments; and (ii) how the upgraded facilities will impact on children with sensory impairment.

(AQW 6380/10)

Minister of Education: Mar atá luaite i mo fhreagra ar do AWQ 6379/10, ní mhaoiúnn an Roinn Oideachais (an RO) aon scoil speisialta go díreach. Leithdháiltear ar Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) an chuid is mó den chistiú d'oideachas speisialta mar chistiú nár cuireadh in áirithe, agus cineann na BOLanna úsáid an chistithe seo mar chuid dá gcinntí blaintúla ar leithdháileadh a mblocdheontais. Tá buiséid leatharmhligthe ag scoileanna speisialta, agus coinníonn na BOLanna féin gach costas atá bainteach le daltaí.

As stated in my response to your previous AQW 6379/10 the Department of Education (DE) does not directly fund any special school. The bulk of funding for special education is allocated to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) as non-earmarked funding, the deployment of which is determined by the ELBs

as part of their annual decisions about the allocation of their block grant. Special schools have partially delegated budgets, with all pupil related costs being retained centrally by the ELBs.

Jordanstown Schools had approached DE at an advanced stage of planning about the possibility of accessing capital funding for the new build, but the school authorities were advised that any potential contribution from government funds would require strict compliance with guidance on tender procedures which would have involved publishing an invitation to tender via the Official Journal of the European Union.

The school authorities decided, based on funds generated from a disposal of surplus, non-educational land to self-fund its capital development. In doing so, DE standard capital planning processes were not followed, including that of an economic appraisal. The designs were informally shared with DE and some guidance accepted to moderate the schedule of accommodation (SOA) provided and to bring costs to an affordable level for the school, although the SOA is still in excess of the type of provision that DE would have agreed for a school of this size.

As the school authorities acted independently and as the project was not taken forward as part of the DE's capital allocation process, no capital funding can, therefore, be made available.

In view of the above you will appreciate that, at this stage, I am not in a position to comment on how the upgraded facilities will impact on children with sensory impairment. In due course the Education and Training Inspectorate will have an opportunity to carry out an inspection of the education provision being delivered in the new school.

Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education, given the capital investment in upgrading facilities at the Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments, why her Department plans to cut the resource budget which will result in fewer teaching staff and reduce the benefit of the new upgraded facilities for children.

(AQW 6381/10)

Minister of Education: Níl sé ar intinn ag an Roinn Oideachais (RO) buiséad acmhainne Scoileanna Bhaile Shiurdáin a laghdú mar ní mhaoiníonn an RO aon scoil speisialta go díreach. Mar atá luaite i mo fhreagra ar do AWQ 6379/10, leithdháiltear ar Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) an chuid is mó den chistiú d'oideachas speisialta mar chistiú nár cuireadh in áirithe, agus cineann na BOLanna úsáid an chistithe seo mar chuid dá gcinntí blaintúla ar leithdháileadh a mblocdheontais. Tá buiséid leatharmhligthe ag scoileanna speisialta, agus coinníonn na BOLanna féin gach costas atá bainteach le daltaí.

The Department of Education (DE) is not planning to cut the resource budget of Jordanstown Schools as DE does not directly fund any special schools. As stated in my answer to your previous AQW 6379/10 the bulk of funding for special education is allocated to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) as non-earmarked funding, the deployment of which is therefore determined by the ELBs as part of their annual decisions about the allocation of their block grant. Special schools have partially delegated budgets, with all pupil related costs being retained centrally by the ELBs.

The Chief Executive of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the proposed reduction in the budget in 2010/11 is in respect of non delegated staffing as the school has been asked to reduce their staffing numbers to reflect the falling pupil enrolment in Jordanstown Schools.

Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education what consideration was given to the Education and Training Inspectorate's 2008 report, which stated that the Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments should co-ordinate the development of a regional sensory advisory support service, before the decision was taken to reduce the resource expenditure at Jordanstown Schools and to invest capital and resources in a further specialist unit for young people with visual impairments elsewhere.

(AQW 6382/10)

Minister of Education: As with all inspection reports the Department of Education (DE) gave full consideration to the 2008 focused inspection report of Jordanstown Schools.

However as special educational provision is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the 5-Board Regional Strategy Group for Special Educational Needs (RSG), at the request of DE, established a working group to promote a consistent approach to service delivery across all Boards which is in line with recommendations contained in the Audit Office report in 1998.

Mar atá luaite i mo fhreagra ar do AWQ 6381/10, ní mhaoiníonn an RO aon scoil speisialta go díreach agus, mar sin de, níl sé ar intinn aici an caiteachas acmhainne a laghdú ar Scoileanna i mBaile Shiurdáin.

As stated in my response to your previous AQW 6381/10 DE does not directly fund any special school and is not planning, therefore, to reduce the resource expenditure at Jordanstown Schools.

The background to the decision to invest capital funding in this resource and the RSG's decision to locate it in the former Castle High School, Belfast is outlined in my response to your previous AQW 6380/10.

I can assure you that the expertise of the staff in the Jordanstown Schools is very much valued. I understand that the Principal of Jordanstown Schools has attended meetings of the sub-group to contribute to discussion about the operational aspects of the centralised resource and the determining factors in establishing the regional resource base in Castle High School.

New School Builds

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to list the schools which will benefit from the budget announced for 2010/11 in relation to new school builds; and the value of each new build.

(AQW 6428/10)

Minister of Education: There are 16 major capital school projects currently on site, representing an investment of over £252m, which will require funding from the capital budget for 2010/11. These are as follows:-

School Name	Capital Cost £M
Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch	13.7
Banbridge Academy	17.9
Belfast Model School For Boys	32.7
Belfast Model School For Girls	30.9
Grosvenor G.S.	27.8
Lisbellaw P.S.	2.3
Lisnagelvin P.S. Derry	5.5
Magherafelt H.S.	10.5
Our Lady & St Patrick's College Knock	23.0
St Cecilia's College, Derry	19.8
St Dominic's H.S. Belfast	18.5
St Joseph's P.S. Carryduff	5.8
St Mary's College Derry	19.8
St Mary's P.S. Portglenone	3.9
St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick	16.8
St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. Ballycastle	3.9

Tá an glanbhuiséad caipitil de £169 milliún don bhliain 2010-11 £84 milliún níos lú agus a bhí sé don bhliain 2009-10, agus ní dhearna mé aon chinneadh ar cé na foirgníochtaí nua scoile a bheidh in ann dul ar aghaidh sa bhliain airgeadais 2010/11. Tá athbhreithniú ar na hoibreacha caipitil faoi bhealach lena chinntiú go n-úsáidfear na sócmhainní atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr a bhaint amach do pháistí agus chun an luach is fearr a bhaint amach do gach cáiníochóir. Mar gheall ar an staid airgeadais sa bhliain 2010/11, ní mór cinntí deacra a dhéanamh.

The net capital budget for 2010-11 of £169million is some £84 million lower in real terms than 2009-10, and I have not yet taken any decision on which new school builds will be able to proceed in the 2010/11 financial year. A review of capital works is underway to ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximise value for every taxpayer. Given the straitened financial position in 2010/11 tough decisions will have to be taken.

Capital Build Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what impact the budget announced for 2010/11 will have in relation to the overall review of the Capital Build Programme.

(AQW 6429/10)

Minister of Education: Is tábhachtach go mbeidh ár n-infheistiú in eastát na scoileanna inmharthana inbhuanaithe san fhadtéarma agus go gcloífidh sé lenár ndualgaí reachtúla um chomhionannas agus um spriocadh ar bhonn riachtanas cuspóireach. Is lárnach de seo atá Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith, an Curaclam Athbhreithnithe, an Creat Teidlíochta, Scoileanna Inmharthana agus an tAthbhreithniú ar an Ghaelscolaíocht. Is é sin an fáth gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil chun cuidiú le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Tá an t-athbhreithniú ceaptha lena chinntiú go gcuirfidh muid méid chuí agus cineál cuí scoile sa suíomh cuí chun riachtanais na bpáistí agus na ndaoine óga a bhaint amach.

It is critical that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework and adheres to the department's statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Entitlement Framework, Sustainable Schools and the Irish Medium Review. This is why I have commissioned a review of all capital projects to inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate. The review is intended to ensure that we put the right size and type of school in the right location to meet the needs of children and young people.

The rate at which we can build new schools is a separate issue and dependent on the available resources. The Education budget as you will be aware is set by the Executive. In my budget statement on 21 April 2010 I highlighted the challenging financial position being faced. My Department has tough decisions to make and I look forward to support from all parties when I make bids for additional funding during in year monitoring rounds.

I have to emphasise that at this stage I have not withdrawn funding for any school. However, given the reduced funding available to my Department it is inevitable that not all capital projects can be progressed as planned.

Emotional Well-being in Schools

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4197/10, to detail the participation levels in (i) mentoring, peer mediation and circle time; (ii) school councils and other pupil participation schemes; and (iii) volunteering, in each of the last three academic years.

(AQW 6456/10)

Minister of Education: The only information which my Department holds is in respect of volunteering through the Millennium Volunteers Programme.

The youth service has a strong voluntary ethos and actively encourages volunteering in a variety of ways, for example through the Millennium Volunteers programme (MV), which is funded by my

Department. Millennium Volunteers make their commitment through a Volunteer Plan that involves 50, 100 or 200 hours of voluntary service in a 12 month period.

Since 1999, over 5500 young people have registered on the programme, with over 4000 gaining the 100 hour Award and over 3000 gaining the Award of Excellence for over 200 hours of voluntary work.

Ina theannta sin, lainseáil Clár Oibrithe Deonacha na Mílaoise Bronnadh na Scoileanna sa bhliain 2007 chun aitheantas a thabhairt do dhaoine óga a bhíonn ag tairiscint cabhrach trína scoileanna. Go dtí seo, chuir 208 duine óg Bronnadh na Scoileanna i gcrích agus meastar go gcuirfidh 520 duine eile an bronnadh i gcrích i mbliana.

In addition, in 2007, the Millennium Volunteer Programme launched the Schools Award to recognise young people volunteering through their schools. To date 308 young people have completed the Schools Award, with a further 520 expected to complete the award this year.

Pupil:Teacher Ratio

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the current; and (ii) the average pupil:teacher ratio in (a) each controlled school; and (b) each maintained school, broken down by (c) primary school; and (d) secondary school.

(AQW 6469/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraítear Cóimheasa Daltaí le Múinteoirí (PTRanna) sna táblaí thíos.

The Pupil: Teacher Ratios (PTRs) are given in the tables below.

School Name	Town/city	PTR	Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools					
Belfast Education and Library Board			Portrush Primary School	Portrush	21.13
Avoniel Primary School	Belfast	20.13	Portstewart Primary School	Portstewart	22.08
Ballygolan Primary School	Newtownabbey	10.95	Randalstown Central Primary School	Antrim	22.52
Ballysillan Primary School	Belfast	18.81	Rasharkin Primary School	Ballymena	21.00
Beechfield Primary School	Belfast	11.51	Rathcoole Primary School	Newtownabbey	20.28
Belmont Primary School	Belfast	23.24	Silverstream Primary School	Carrickfergus	18.55
Blackmountain Primary School	Belfast	17.14	Straid Primary School	Ballyclare	19.40
Blythefield Primary School	Belfast	15.67	Straidbilly Primary School	Ballymoney	17.20
Botanic Primary School	Belfast	20.48	Straidhavern Primary School	Crumlin	19.31
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	Belfast	15.79	Sunnylands Primary School	Carrickfergus	16.54

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Carr's Glen Primary School	Belfast	22.06		Templepatrick Primary School	Ballyclare	23.88
Cavehill Primary School	Belfast	23.53		The Diamond Primary School	Ballymena	17.00
Currie Primary School	Belfast	15.22		The Wm. Pinkerton Memorial Primary School	Ballymoney	18.94
Donegall Road Primary School	Belfast	17.79		Thompson Primary School	Ballyclare	20.00
Dundela Infants School	Belfast	21.75		Tildarg Primary School	Ballyclare	16.34
Edenbrooke Primary School	Belfast	13.28		Tobermore Primary School	Magherafelt	19.70
Elmgrove Primary School	Belfast	20.47		Toreagh Primary School	Larne	18.81
Euston Street Primary School	Belfast	20.20		Upper Ballyboley Primary School	Ballyclare	13.52
Fane Street Primary School	Belfast	17.50		Victoria Primary School	Carrickfergus	24.30
Finaghy Primary School	Belfast	24.19		Whiteabbey Primary School	Newtownabbey	24.06
Forth River Primary School	Belfast	22.83		Whitehead Primary School	Carrickfergus	22.00
Glenwood Primary School	Belfast	20.57		Whitehouse Primary School	Newtownabbey	21.60
Greenwood Primary School	Belfast	24.49		Woodburn Primary School	Carrickfergus	22.55
Grove Primary School	Belfast	16.17		Woodlawn Primary School	Carrickfergus	21.62
Harding Memorial Primary School	Belfast	20.63		South Eastern Education and Library Board		
Harmony Primary School	Belfast	19.45		Abbey Primary School	Newtownards	22.88
Knocknagoney Primary School	Belfast	14.86		Academy Primary School	Saintfield	22.44
Ligoniel Primary School	Belfast	20.17		Alexander Dickson Primary School	Newtownards	20.95
Lowwood Primary School	Belfast	25.93		Anahilt Primary School	Hillsborough	24.01

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Malvern Primary School	Belfast	16.42		Andrews Memorial Primary School	Newtownards	22.60
Nettlefield Primary School	Belfast	17.13		Ballinderry Primary School	Lisburn	20.59
Orangefield Primary School	Belfast	23.51		Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School	Lisburn	22.43
Rosetta Primary School	Belfast	20.14		Ballycloughan Primary School	Saintfield	12.50
Seaview Primary School	Belfast	20.07		Ballyholme Primary School	Bangor	23.66
Springfield Primary School	Belfast	14.20		Ballykeigle Primary School	Newtownards	15.06
Springhill Primary School	Belfast	20.58		Ballymacash Primary School	Lisburn	22.07
Strandtown Primary School	Belfast	24.77		Ballymagee Primary School	Bangor	25.47
Stranmillis Primary School	Belfast	25.98		Ballynahinch Primary School	Ballynahinch	18.60
Suffolk Primary School	Belfast	11.44		Ballyvester Primary School	Donaghadee	15.47
Taughmonagh Primary School	Belfast	13.82		Ballywalter Primary School	Newtownards	19.48
Vere Foster Primary School	Belfast	14.75		Belvoir Park Primary School	Belfast	15.83
Victoria Park Primary School	Belfast	17.52		Bloomfield Primary School	Bangor	18.27
Wheatfield Primary School	Belfast	16.18		Braniel Primary School	Belfast	20.73
Western Education and Library Board				Brooklands Primary School	Belfast	19.05
Aghadrumsee Primary School	Enniskillen	16.53		Brownlee Primary School	Lisburn	20.88
Ardstraw Primary School	Omagh	19.67		Cairnshill Primary School	Belfast	22.80
Artigarvan Primary School	Strabane	22.08		Carr Primary School	Lisburn	18.82
Ashlea Primary School	Derry	17.09		Carrickmannon Primary School	Newtownards	19.59
Ballinamallard Primary School	Enniskillen	20.48		Carrowdore Primary School	Carrowdore	16.52

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Ballougry Primary School	Derry	22.32		Carryduff Primary School	Belfast	21.18
Ballykelly Primary School	Limavady	22.43		Castle Gardens Primary School	Newtownards	27.00
Bellarena Primary School	Limavady	13.98		Castlewellan Primary School	Castlewellan	15.60
Belleek Primary School	Enniskillen	15.83		Clandeboyne Primary School	Bangor	18.89
Bready Jubilee Primary School	Strabane	19.55		Comber Primary School	Newtownards	18.61
Bridgehill Primary School	Castlederg	15.33		Crawfordsburn Primary School	Bangor	21.00
Brookeborough Primary School	Enniskillen	15.75		Cregagh Primary School	Belfast	15.47
Cooley Primary School	Omagh	21.17		Cumran Primary School	Downpatrick	19.95
Culmore Primary School	Derry	20.50		Derriaghy Primary School	Lisburn	11.90
Cumber Claudy Primary School	Derry	20.67		Derryboy Primary School	Crossgar	20.65
Denamona Primary School	Omagh	19.00		Donaghadee Primary School	Donaghadee	22.70
Derrygonnelly Primary School	Enniskillen	14.59		Downpatrick Primary School	Downpatrick	18.25
Donemana Primary School	Strabane	18.32		Downshire Primary School	Hillsborough	23.08
Dromore Primary School	Omagh	14.32		Dromara Primary School	Dromara	22.37
Drumachose Primary School	Limavady	20.18		Dundonald Primary School	Belfast	23.44
Drumahoe Primary School	Derry	19.97		Dunmurry Primary School	Belfast	19.66
Drumlegagh Primary School	Omagh	14.00		Fort Hill Primary School	Lisburn	24.27
Drumrane Primary School	Dungiven	23.25		Gilnahirk Primary School	Belfast	28.10
Dunmullan Primary School	Omagh	21.33		Glasswater Primary School	Downpatrick	17.77
Ebrington Controlled Primary School	Derry	21.02		Grange Park Primary School	Bangor	23.24

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Edwards Primary School	Castledearg	15.83		Grey Abbey Primary School	Newtownards	18.25
Eglinton Primary School	Derry	22.56		Harmony Hill Primary School	Lisburn	23.45
Enniskillen Model Primary School	Enniskillen	22.05		Hollywood Primary School	Hollywood	21.44
Erganagh Primary School	Castledearg	14.33		Kilcooley Primary School	Bangor	17.51
Florencecourt Primary School	Enniskillen	18.40		Killinchy Primary School	Newtownards	21.03
Fountain Primary School	Derry	16.67		Killowen Primary School	Lisburn	21.56
Gibson Primary School	Omagh	17.31		Killyleagh Primary School	Downpatrick	14.40
Gillygooley Primary School	Omagh	20.00		Kilmaine Primary School	Bangor	27.61
Gortin Primary School	Omagh	15.00		Kirkistown Primary School	Newtownards	20.31
Greenhaw Primary School	Derry	21.29		Knockbreda Primary School	Belfast	16.07
Irvinestown Primary School	Enniskillen	20.70		Knockmore Primary School	Lisburn	10.06
Jones Memorial Primary School	Enniskillen	19.28		Largymore Primary School	Lisburn	18.14
Kesh Primary School	Enniskillen	20.91		Lead Hill Primary School	Belfast	20.83
Killen Primary School	Castledearg	18.40		Lisburn Central Primary School	Lisburn	17.69
Lack Primary School	Enniskillen	17.00		Lisnasharragh Primary School	Belfast	21.45
Langfield Primary School	Omagh	20.00		Londonderry Primary School	Newtownards	20.84
Limavady Central Primary School	Limavady	23.39		Loughries Primary School	Newtownards	16.83
Lisbellaw Primary School	Enniskillen	21.36		Maghaberry Primary School	Craigavon	22.52
Lisnagelvin Primary School	Derry	23.78		McKinney Primary School (Dundrod)	Crumlin	16.59

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Derry Model Primary School	Derry	23.37		Meadow Bridge Primary School	Hillsborough	22.17
Maguiresbridge Primary School	Enniskillen	20.00		Millisle Primary School	Newtownards	17.64
McClintock Primary School	Omagh	16.47		Moirra Primary School	Moirra	23.60
Moat Primary School	Enniskillen	21.39		Moneyrea Primary School	Newtownards	19.24
Newbuildings Primary School	Derry	19.13		Newcastle Primary School	Newcastle	16.88
Newtownbutler Primary School	Enniskillen	16.60		Newtownards Model Primary School	Newtownards	21.74
Newtownstewart Model Primary School	Omagh	19.00		Newtownbreda Primary School	Belfast	15.60
Omagh County Primary School	Omagh	20.69		Old Warren Primary School	Lisburn	16.53
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School	Omagh	18.67		Pond Park Primary School	Lisburn	22.32
Sion Mills Primary School	Strabane	23.26		Portavogie Primary School	Newtownards	19.81
Strabane Controlled Primary School	Strabane	21.61		Rathmore Primary School	Bangor	22.66
Tempo Primary School	Enniskillen	21.00		Redburn Primary School	Holywood	17.86
North Eastern Education and Library Board				Riverdale Primary School	Lisburn	22.69
Abbots Cross Primary School	Newtownabbey	24.25		Seymour Hill Primary School	Belfast	17.19
Ampertaine Primary School	Maghera	21.19		Spa Primary School	Ballynahinch	22.47
Antrim Primary School	Antrim	25.21		Tonagh Primary School	Lisburn	19.96
Armoy Primary School	Ballymoney	15.30		Towerview Primary School	Bangor	19.80
Ashgrove Primary School	Newtownabbey	21.92		Tullycarnet Primary School	Belfast	14.20
Ballee Primary School	Ballymena	17.09		Victoria Primary School	Newtownards	22.83

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Ballycarry Primary School	Carrickfergus	18.88		Victoria Primary School (Ballyhalbert)	Newtownards	17.59
Ballyclare Primary School	Ballyclare	20.20		West Winds Primary School	Newtownards	19.43
Ballycraigy Primary School	Antrim	17.64		Southern Education and Library Board		
Ballyhenry Primary School	Newtownabbey	18.10		Abercorn Primary School	Banbridge	22.36
Ballykeel Primary School	Ballymena	19.49		Aghavilly Primary School	Armagh	15.00
Ballymena Primary School	Ballymena	21.00		Annalong Primary School	Newry	22.57
Ballymoney Primary School	Ballymoney	16.63		Armstrong Primary School	Armagh	17.42
Ballynure Primary School	Ballyclare	21.33		Augher Central Primary School	Augher	15.83
Ballysally Primary School	Coleraine	15.56		Aughnacloy Primary School	Aughnacloy	19.80
Ballytober Primary School	Bushmills	17.38		Ballydown Primary School	Banbridge	24.13
Balnamore Primary School	Ballymoney	20.41		Ballyoran Primary School	Portadown	18.11
Bellaghy Primary School	Magherafelt	16.36		Ballytrea Primary School	Dungannon	17.45
Broughshane Primary School	Ballymena	23.92		Benburb Primary School	Benburb	4.58
Buick Memorial Primary School	Ballymena	21.71		Bessbrook Primary School	Newry	19.60
Bushmills Primary School	Bushmills	18.92		Birches Primary School	Craigavon	22.50
Bushvalley Primary School	Ballymoney	18.69		Bleary Primary School	Craigavon	17.41
Cairncastle Primary School	Larne	18.74		Bocombra Primary School	Portadown	22.66
Camphill Primary School	Ballymena	24.16		Brackenagh West Primary School	Kilkeel	20.55
Carnaghts Primary School	Ballymena	15.49		Bronte Primary School	Banbridge	21.53
Carnalbanagh Primary School	Ballymena	13.84		Bush Primary School	Dungannon	21.50

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Carnalridge Primary School	Portrush	21.33		Carntall Primary School	Clogher	19.33
Carniny Primary School	Ballymena	21.80		Carrick Primary School	Lurgan	17.03
Carnmoney Primary School	Newtownabbey	21.58		Churchill Primary School	Caledon	18.89
Carrickfergus Central Primary School	Carrickfergus	19.93		Churchtown Primary School	Cookstown	16.78
Carrickfergus Model Primary School	Carrickfergus	25.38		Clare Primary School	Tandragee	22.80
Carrowreagh Primary School	Ballymoney	19.29		Clogher Regional Primary School	Clogher	8.02
Castledawson Primary School	Magherafelt	19.64		Coagh Primary School	Cookstown	14.36
Castleroe Primary School	Coleraine	15.90		Cookstown Primary School	Cookstown	18.61
Clough Primary School	Ballymena	19.45		Cortamlet Primary School	Newry	20.80
Cloughmills Primary School	Ballymena	13.53		Craigavon Primary School	Craigavon	21.40
Creavery Primary School	Antrim	17.26		Darkley Primary School	Armagh	16.20
Crumlin Primary School	Crumlin	18.29		Derryhale Primary School	Portadown	18.68
Culcrow Primary School	Coleraine	16.88		Dickson Primary School	Lurgan	17.80
Cullycapple Primary School	Coleraine	11.33		Donacloney Primary School	Craigavon	19.45
Culnady Primary School	Maghera	13.67		Donaghey Primary School	Dungannon	18.44
Damhead Primary School	Coleraine	20.30		Donaghmore Primary School	Dungannon	14.67
DH Christie Memorial Primary School	Coleraine	21.66		Dromore Central Primary School	Dromore	23.19
Doagh Primary School	Ballyclare	15.44		Dromore Road Primary School	Warrenpoint	18.41
Drumard Primary School	Maghera	14.51		Drumadonnell Primary School	Banbridge	24.98

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Dunclug Primary School	Ballymena	16.71		Drumgor Primary School	Craigavon	19.50
Duneane Primary School	Antrim	15.45		Drumhillery Primary School	Armagh	17.11
Dunseverick Primary School	Bushmills	17.96		Drumsallen Primary School	Armagh	22.16
Earlview Primary School	Newtownabbey	20.00		Dungannon Primary School	Dungannon	14.60
Eden Primary School	Carrickfergus	22.77		Edenderry Primary School	Craigavon	17.72
Eden Primary School	Ballymoney	21.31		Edenderry Primary School	Banbridge	20.91
Fairview Primary School	Ballyclare	22.57		Fair Hill Primary School	Dromore	20.66
Fourtowns Primary School	Ballymena	20.85		Fivemiletown Primary School	Fivemiletown	23.14
Garryduff Primary School	Ballymoney	17.35		Foley County Primary School	Armagh	17.75
Garvagh Primary School	Coleraine	18.29		Hamiltonsbawn Primary School	Armagh	22.57
Glynn Primary School	Larne	19.44		Hardy Memorial Primary School	Armagh	23.02
Gorran Primary School	Coleraine	18.70		Hart Memorial Primary School	Craigavon	21.14
Gracehill Primary School	Ballymena	22.53		Howard Primary School	Dungannon	21.70
Greenisland Primary School	Carrickfergus	23.79		Iveagh Primary School	Newry	21.93
Greystone Primary School	Antrim	20.10		Keady Primary School	Armagh	9.09
Groggan Primary School	Antrim	19.53		Kilkeel Primary School	Kilkeel	19.71
Harpurs Hill Primary School	Coleraine	16.03		Killylea Primary School	Armagh	15.29
Harryville Primary School	Ballymena	15.23		Killyman Primary School	Dungannon	16.95
Hazelbank Primary School	Ballymena	17.14		King's Park Primary School	Lurgan	22.58
Hezlett Primary School	Coleraine	20.93		Kingsmills Primary School	Armagh	17.33

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Hollybank Primary School	Newtownabbey	24.15		Lisfearthy Primary School	Dungannon	17.33
Irish Society's Primary School	Coleraine	21.88		Lisnadill Primary School	Armagh	16.82
Kells & Connor Primary School	Ballymena	20.99		Lurgan Model Primary School	Lurgan	18.70
Kilbride Primary School	Ballyclare	16.82		Maralin Village Primary School	Craigavon	22.68
Killowen Primary School	Coleraine	21.25		Markethill Primary School	Armagh	22.97
Kilmoyle Primary School	Ballymoney	18.83		Millington Primary School	Craigavon	23.50
Kilrea Primary School	Coleraine	17.82		Milltown Primary School	Banbridge	15.31
Kilross Primary School	Magherafelt	17.15		Moneymore Primary School	Magherafelt	21.24
King's Park Primary School	Newtownabbey	21.06		Mountnorris Primary School	Armagh	19.32
Kirkinriola Primary School	Ballymena	21.03		Moy Regional Primary School	Dungannon	18.00
Knockahollet Primary School	Ballymena	15.60		Moyallon Primary School	Craigavon	21.62
Knockloughrim Primary School	Magherafelt	16.75		Mullaghglass Primary School	Newry	17.91
Landhead Primary School	Ballymoney	13.90		Mullavilly Primary School	Tandragee	22.27
Larne and Inver Primary School	Larne	20.94		Newmills Primary School	Dungannon	21.00
Leaney Primary School	Ballymoney	22.71		Newtownhamilton Primary School	Newry	18.00
Linn Primary School	Larne	22.28		Orchard County Primary School	Craigavon	19.44
Lislagan Primary School	Ballymoney	19.80		Orritor Primary School	Cookstown	22.52
Loanends Primary School	Crumlin	23.25		Poyntzpass Primary School	Poyntzpass	22.11
Longstone Primary School	Ballymena	16.31		Queen Elizabeth II (Pomeroy) Primary School	Dungannon	11.31
Macosquin Primary School	Coleraine	21.13		Rich Mount Primary School	Portadown	17.53

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(a) (c) Controlled Primary Schools						
Maghera Primary School	Maghera	14.28		Richmond Primary School	Dungannon	17.67
Magherafelt Controlled Primary School	Magherafelt	20.07		Scarva Primary School	Craigavon	15.94
Mallusk Primary School	Newtownabbey	20.36		Stewartstown Primary School	Stewartstown	13.93
Millburn Primary School	Coleraine	21.72		Tandragee Primary School	Tandragee	22.43
Moorfields Primary School	Ballymena	24.22		The Cope Primary School	Armagh	16.54
Mossgrove Primary School	Newtownabbey	19.86		Tullygally Primary School	Lurgan	16.00
Mossley Primary School	Newtownabbey	23.38		Walker Memorial Primary School	Dungannon	19.50
Moyle Primary School	Larne	18.32		Waringstown Primary School	Craigavon	23.56
Mullaghdubh Primary School	Larne	13.05		Windsor Hill Primary School	Newry	18.13
Oakfield Primary School	Carrickfergus	21.02		Woods Primary School	Magherafelt	20.86
Olderfleet Primary School	Larne	20.42				
Parkgate Primary School	Ballyclare	17.89				
Parkhall Primary School	Antrim	24.10				
Portglenone Primary School	Ballymena	20.43				

School Name	Town/City	PTR		Name	Town/City	PTR
(a) (d) Controlled Secondary¹ Schools						
Belfast Education and Library Board				Parkhall High College	Antrim	14.90
Ashfield Boys' High School	Belfast	14.45		South Eastern Education and Library Board		
Ashfield Girls' High School	Belfast	15.25		Bangor Academy and 6th Form College	Bangor	15.70
Belfast Boys' Model School	Belfast	14.43		Donaghadee High School	Donaghadee	7.58

School Name	Town/City	PTR		Name	Town/City	PTR
(a) (d) Controlled Secondary¹ Schools						
Belfast Model School For Girls	Belfast	14.03		Dundonald High School	Belfast	11.76
Castle High School	Belfast	3.65		Dunmurry High School	Belfast	13.49
Orangefield High School	Belfast	13.66		Glastry College	Newtownards	15.17
Western Education and Library Board				Knockbreda High School	Belfast	13.34
Castledearg High School	Castledearg	13.92		Laurelhill Community College	Lisburn	14.76
Devenish College	Enniskillen	14.04		Lisnagarvey High School	Lisburn	12.15
Limavady High School	Limavady	13.71		Movilla High School	Newtownards	14.52
Lisnaskea High School	Enniskillen	11.99		Nendrum College	Newtownards	14.42
Lisneal College	Derry	14.32		Newtownbreda High School	Belfast	15.85
Omagh High School	Omagh	14.16		Saintfield High School	Saintfield	15.04
Strabane High School	Strabane	12.90		The High School Ballynahinch	Ballynahinch	12.70
North Eastern Education and Library Board				Southern Education and Library Board		
Ballee Community High School	Ballymena	14.05		Aughnacloy High School	Aughnacloy	12.11
Ballycastle High School	Ballycastle	14.16		Banbridge High School	Banbridge	14.29
Ballyclare Secondary School	Ballyclare	14.82		City Armagh High School	Armagh	11.84
Ballymoney High School	Ballymoney	13.79		Clounagh Junior High School	Portadown	14.08
Carrickfergus College	Carrickfergus	14.25		Cookstown High School	Cookstown	15.40
Coleraine College	Coleraine	11.56		Craigavon Senior High School	Portadown	13.55
Cullybackey High School	Ballymena	15.13		Dromore High School	Dromore	16.14

School Name	Town/City	PTR		Name	Town/City	PTR
(a) (d) Controlled Secondary¹ Schools						
Downshire School	Carrickfergus	13.29		Drumglass High School	Dungannon	13.61
Dunclug College	Ballymena	14.42		Fivemiletown College	Fivemiletown	13.32
Dunluce School	Bushmills	15.79		Kilkeel High School	Newry	14.03
Garvagh High School	Coleraine	12.13		Killicomaine Junior High School	Portadown	14.41
Glengormley High School	Newtownabbey	13.75		Lurgan Junior High	Lurgan	15.59
Larne High School	Larne	13.55		Markethill High School	Armagh	15.84
Maghera High School	Maghera	8.75		Newry High School	Newry	14.26
Magherafelt High School	Magherafelt	13.43		Newtownhamilton High School	Newry	12.46
Monkstown Community School	Newtownabbey	14.59		Rathfriland High School	Newry	14.65
Newtownabbey Community High School	Newtownabbey	13.87		Tandragee Junior High School	Tandragee	13.47

1 Excludes Grammar Schools

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
Belfast Education and Library Board				St Mary's Primary School (Bellaghy)	Magherafelt	19.06
Edmund Rice (CB) Primary School	Belfast	20.64		St Mary's Primary School (Cushendall)	Ballymena	18.24
Holy Child Primary School	Belfast	20.83		St Mary's Primary School (Draperstown)	Magherafelt	23.00
Holy Cross Boys' Primary School	Belfast	21.35		St Mary's Primary School (Glenravel)	Ballymena	18.75
Holy Cross Girls' Primary School	Belfast	15.79		St Mary's Primary School (Portglenone)	Ballymena	20.01

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
Holy Family Primary School	Belfast	19.49		St Mary's Primary School (Rathlin Island)	Ballycastle	4.00
Holy Rosary Primary School	Belfast	18.40		St Mary's-on-the-Hill Primary School	Newtownabbey	22.69
Holy Trinity Primary School	Belfast	18.89		St Nicholas' Primary School	Carrickfergus	22.20
Mercy Primary School	Belfast	21.24		St Olcan's Primary School	Ballymoney	13.91
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School	Belfast	22.57		St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School	Antrim	17.87
Our Lady's Girls' Primary School	Belfast	18.50		St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School	Ballycastle	21.20
Sacred Heart Primary School	Belfast	20.50		St Patrick's & St Joseph's Primary School	Coleraine	20.41
St Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary School	Belfast	18.67		St Patrick's Primary School	Portrush	15.31
St Anne's Primary School	Belfast	24.64		St Patrick's Primary School	Maghera	22.57
St Bernadette's Primary School	Belfast	15.73		St Patrick's Primary School (Loughguile)	Ballymena	20.81
St Bride's Primary School	Belfast	23.28		St Patrick's Primary School (Rasharkin)	Ballymena	20.59
St Clare's Primary School	Belfast	22.49		St Patrick's Primary School (Waterfoot)	Ballymena	20.33
St John the Baptist Boys' Primary School	Belfast	21.15		St Paul's Primary School	Ballymena	8.44
St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School	Belfast	18.10		St Trea's Primary School	Magherafelt	24.25
St Joseph's Primary School (Holland Drive)	Belfast	19.42		Tir na nÓg Primary School	Ballyclare	17.50
St Joseph's Primary School (Slate Street)	Belfast	17.77		South Eastern Education and Library Board		
St Kevin's Primary School	Belfast	20.14		Ballymacrickett Primary School	Crumlin	22.52

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Malachy's Primary School	Belfast	19.48		Ballymacward Primary School	Lisburn	18.60
St Mary's Primary School	Belfast	15.88		Christ the King Primary School	Ballynahinch	21.80
St Mary's Star of the Sea Primary School	Belfast	20.47		Christ the Redeemer Primary School	Belfast	24.70
St Matthew's Primary School	Belfast	19.71		Convent of Mercy Primary School	Downpatrick	18.77
St Michael's Primary School	Belfast	22.09		Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School	Belfast	25.49
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Belfast	20.03		Sacred Heart Primary School	Newcastle	21.00
St Paul's Primary School	Belfast	17.09		St Aloysius Primary School	Lisburn	19.35
St Peter's Primary School	Belfast	19.64		St Anne's Primary School	Donaghadee	15.50
St Teresa's Primary School	Belfast	23.12		St Bernard's Primary School	Belfast	24.81
St Therese of Lisieux Primary School	Belfast	21.49		St Brigid's Primary School	Downpatrick	21.38
St Vincent de Paul Primary School	Belfast	20.80		St Caolan's Primary School	Ballynahinch	15.26
Star of the Sea Girls' Primary School	Belfast	18.31		St Colman's Primary School	Moir	2.00
Western Education and Library Board				St Colman's Primary School	Lisburn	22.07
All Saints Primary School	Omagh	10.50		St Colmcille's Primary School	Downpatrick	18.18
Altishane Primary School	Strabane	19.00		St Comgall's Primary School	Bangor	22.31
Barrack Street Boys' Primary School	Strabane	20.33		St Finian's Primary School	Newtownards	21.71
Broadbridge Primary School	Derry	24.80		St Francis' Primary School	Castlewellan	14.68
Bunscoil Cholmcille	Derry	20.13		St Ita's Primary School	Belfast	22.25

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
Chapel Road Primary School	Derry	21.00		St Joseph's Primary School	Lisburn	22.17
Christ the King Primary School	Omagh	15.60		St Joseph's Primary School	Crossgar	19.74
Cornagague Primary School	Enniskillen	19.67		St Joseph's Primary School	Newcastle	21.00
Corranny Primary School	Enniskillen	18.50		St Joseph's Primary School	Strangford	12.00
Craigbrack Primary School	Derry	19.80		St Joseph's Primary School	Killough	19.55
Drumduff Primary School	Omagh	15.67		St Joseph's Primary School (Ballycruttle Road)	Downpatrick	13.47
Drumlish Primary School	Omagh	17.29		St Joseph's Primary School (Carryduff)	Belfast	23.75
Drumnabey Primary School	Castlederg	15.00		St Joseph's Primary School (Tyrella Road)	Downpatrick	15.42
Envagh Primary School	Omagh	14.50		St Kieran's Primary School	Belfast	15.96
Evish Primary School	Strabane	18.33		St Luke's Primary School	Belfast	16.88
Faughanvale Primary School	Derry	20.00		St Macartan's Primary School	Downpatrick	21.54
Glendermott Primary School	Derry	21.50		St Malachy's Primary School	Bangor	20.87
Good Shepherd Primary School and Nursery School	Derry	24.09		St Malachy's Primary School	Castlewellan	18.81
Gortnagarn Primary School	Omagh	14.50		St Malachy's Primary School (Kilcoo)	Newry	18.89
Hollybush Primary School	Derry	23.17		St Malachy's Primary School (Strangford)	Downpatrick	17.75
Holy Child Primary School	Derry	19.64		St Mark's Primary School	Belfast	22.15
Holy Family Primary School	Derry	20.45		St Mary's Aghlismafin	Castlewellan	20.72

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
Holy Trinity Primary School	Enniskillen	21.43		St Mary's Primary School	Saintfield	17.97
Killyhommon Primary School	Enniskillen	20.33		St Mary's Primary School	Ardglass	20.20
Knocknagor Primary School	Omagh	17.67		St Mary's Primary School	Newcastle	20.83
Listress Primary School	Derry	13.00		St Mary's Primary School (Comber)	Newtownards	15.67
Longtower Primary School	Derry	21.62		St Mary's Primary School (Killyleagh)	Downpatrick	17.57
Loreto Convent Primary School	Omagh	22.89		St Mary's Primary School (Kircubbin)	Newtownards	16.62
Loughash Primary School	Strabane	18.50		St Mary's Primary School (Portaferry)	Newtownards	19.82
Magheralough Primary School	Omagh	13.50		St Nicholas' Primary School	Ardglass	21.48
Mullabuoy Primary School	Derry	23.24		St Patrick's Boys' Primary School	Downpatrick	20.07
Nazareth House Primary School	Derry	20.36		St Patrick's Primary School	Hollywood	20.82
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School	Omagh	20.20		St Patrick's Primary School	Ballynahinch	20.82
Recarson Primary School	Omagh	21.67		St Patrick's Primary School	Castlewellan	18.76
Roscavey Primary School	Omagh	17.50		St Patrick's Primary School (Legamaddy)	Downpatrick	22.26
Rosemount Primary School	Derry	22.67		St Patrick's Primary School (Portaferry)	Newtownards	20.80
Sacred Heart Primary School	Omagh	22.00		St Patrick's Primary School (Saul)	Downpatrick	25.17
St Aidan's Primary School Magilligan	Limavady	16.00		The Good Shepherd Primary School	Belfast	17.72
St Anne's Primary School	Derry	21.17		The Holy Family Primary School	Downpatrick	25.13
St Anne's Primary School	Strabane	19.23		Southern Education and Library Board		
St Anthony's Primary School	Limavady	15.50		Anamar Primary School	Newry	13.28

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Brigid's Primary School (Gortin)	Omagh	20.93		Aughamullan Primary School	Dungannon	17.00
St Brigid's Primary School (Mountfield)	Omagh	15.20		Ballyholland Primary School	Newry	21.73
St Brigid's Primary School (Shantallow)	Derry	17.72		Ballylifford Primary School	Cookstown	16.93
St Brigid's Primary School (Sixmilecross)	Omagh	15.75		Blessed Patrick O'Loughran Primary School	Dungannon	21.51
St Caireall's Primary School	Castlederg	21.25		Carrick Primary School	Warrenpoint	24.33
St Canice's Primary School (Dungiven)	Derry	21.48		Christian Brothers' Primary School	Armagh	15.74
St Canice's Primary School (Feeny)	Derry	22.12		Clea Primary School	Keady	16.53
St Colmcille's Primary School (Brook Street)	Omagh	22.50		Clintyclay Primary School	Dungannon	15.00
St Colmcille's Primary School (Claudy)	Derry	23.05		Clonalig Primary School	Newry	19.74
St Columban's Primary School	Enniskillen	20.47		Clontifleece Primary School	Warrenpoint	16.87
St Columba's Primary School (Clady)	Strabane	20.00		Cloughoge Primary School	Newry	24.39
St Columba's Primary School (Dromore)	Omagh	8.00		Crievagh Primary School	Cookstown	18.18
St Columba's Primary School (New Buildings)	Derry	16.67		Derrychrin Primary School	Cookstown	19.80
St Columbkille's Primary School	Omagh	19.71		Derrylatinee Primary School	Dungannon	21.78
St Conor's Primary School	Omagh	21.41		Dromintee Primary School	Newry	24.14
St Davog's Primary School	Enniskillen	20.33		Edendork Primary School	Dungannon	20.23

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Davog's Scraghey Primary School	Castlederg	9.50		Grange Primary School	Newry	21.20
St Dympna's Primary School	Omagh	24.17		Holy Cross Primary School	Newry	21.40
St Eithne's Primary School	Derry	22.25		Holy Trinity Primary School	Cookstown	22.51
St Eugene's Primary School	Strabane	18.67		Jonesborough Primary School	Newry	17.80
St Eugene's Primary School	Omagh	20.50		Killeen Primary School	Newry	19.26
St Eugene's Primary School	Derry	21.33		Killowen Primary School	Newry	20.58
St Eugene's Primary School (Lisnaskea)	Enniskillen	14.00		Laghey Primary School	Dungannon	16.76
St John the Baptist Primary School	Enniskillen	18.50		Lissan Primary School	Cookstown	20.32
St John's Primary School	Derry	21.41		Moneydarragh Primary School	Newry	20.25
St John's Primary School	Derry	21.43		Mount St Catherine's Primary School	Armagh	20.94
St Joseph's Primary School	Strabane	11.43		Our Lady's and St Mochua's Primary School	Keady	22.44
St Joseph's Primary School (Drumquin)	Omagh	23.25		Our Lady's Primary School	Dungannon	17.78
St Joseph's Primary School (Ederney)	Enniskillen	19.14		Presentation Primary School	Craigavon	22.88
St Joseph's Primary School (Lisnaskea)	Enniskillen	18.75		Primate Dixon Primary School	Coalisland	17.23
St Lawrence's Primary School	Omagh	22.30		Roan St Patrick's Primary School	Dungannon	19.50
St Macartan's Primary School	Omagh	17.50		Sacred Heart Primary School	Dungannon	17.93
St Martin's Primary School	Enniskillen	18.40		St Anthony's Primary School	Craigavon	22.17

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Mary's Boys' Primary School	Strabane	23.04		St Brendan's Primary School	Craigavon	20.59
St Mary's Girls' Primary School	Strabane	21.20		St Brigid's (Drumilly) Primary School	Belleek	22.33
St Mary's Gortnaghey Primary School	Derry	17.00		St Brigid's Primary School	Coalisland	18.43
St Mary's Primary School	Enniskillen	20.40		St Brigid's Primary School	Augher	16.34
St Mary's Primary School	Omagh	22.59		St Brigid's Primary School (Crossmaglen)	Newry	16.78
St Mary's Primary School	Strabane	21.22		St Bronagh's Primary School	Rostrevor	21.22
St Mary's Primary School (Bellanaleck)	Enniskillen	19.33		St Clare's Convent Primary School	Newry	21.90
St Mary's Primary School (Brookeborough)	Enniskillen	20.00		St Colman's (Bann) Primary School	Craigavon	22.25
St Mary's Primary School (Claudy)	Derry	22.22		St Colman's Abbey Primary School	Newry	20.00
St Mary's Primary School (Derrylester)	Enniskillen	22.33		St Colman's Primary School	Dromore	19.77
St Mary's Primary School (Derrylin)	Enniskillen	21.67		St Colman's Primary School	Banbridge	24.88
St Mary's Primary School (Maguiresbridge)	Enniskillen	15.17		St Colman's Primary School (Kilkeel)	Newry	18.00
St Mary's Primary School (Tempo)	Enniskillen	24.50		St Colman's Primary School (Saval)	Newry	23.53
St Matthew's Primary School	Limavady	21.75		St Colmcille's Primary School	Armagh	7.50
St Matthew's Primary School	Dungannon	13.50		St Dallan's Primary School	Warrenpoint	23.01
St Naile's Primary School	Enniskillen	19.75		St Francis of Assisi Primary School	Keady	20.91
St Ninnidh's Primary School	Enniskillen	16.75		St Francis Primary School	Lurgan	22.35

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Derry	22.43		St Francis' Primary School	Banbridge	22.00
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School (Beragh)	Omagh	17.97		St James' Primary School	Armagh	12.10
St Patrick's Primary School (Pennyburn)	Derry	22.54		St Jarlath's Primary School	Dungannon	21.38
St Patrick's Primary School	Castlederg	18.92		St John the Baptist Primary School	Craigavon	19.44
St Patrick's Primary School (Carrickmore)	Omagh	12.00		St John's Eglisish Primary School	Craigavon	11.37
St Patrick's Primary School (Derrygonnelly)	Enniskillen	19.94		St Johns Primary School	Armagh	20.09
St Patrick's Primary School (Dunamanagh)	Strabane	14.00		St John's Primary School	Newry	10.88
St Patrick's Primary School (Eskra)	Omagh	17.34		St John's Primary School (Coalisland)	Dungannon	24.00
St Patrick's Primary School (Gortin)	Omagh	18.32		St John's Primary School (Gilford)	Craigavon	18.91
St Patrick's Primary School (Mullinaskea)	Enniskillen	22.94		St John's Primary School (Moy)	Dungannon	20.30
St Patrick's Primary School (Newtownstewart)	Omagh	20.71		St Josephs and St James Primary School	Newry	22.40
St Patrick's Primary School (Seskinore)	Omagh	7.00		St Joseph's Convent Primary School	Newry	19.70
St Paul's Primary School	Enniskillen	19.97		St Joseph's Primary School	Armagh	17.98
St Paul's Primary School (Slievemore)	Derry	19.56		St Joseph's Primary School	Dungannon	20.46
St Peter's & St Paul's Primary School	Derry	17.00		St Joseph's Primary School	Cookstown	22.75

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Peter's Primary School	Omagh	17.60		St Joseph's Primary School	Caledon	16.00
St Ronan's Primary School	Enniskillen	19.00		St Joseph's Primary School (Convent Hill)	Newry	17.65
St Scire's Primary School	Omagh	21.53		St Joseph's Primary School (Kilkeel)	Newry	19.51
St Teresa's Primary School	Omagh	18.28		St Joseph's Primary School (Killeavy)	Newry	17.90
St Theresa's Primary School	Strabane	20.83		St Laurence O'Toole's Primary School	Belleek	18.74
St Therese Primary School	Derry	20.63		St Macartan's Primary School	Clogher	19.97
St Tierney's Primary School	Enniskillen	20.00		St Malachy's Primary School	Magherafelt	23.14
St. Finlough's Primary School	Limavady	16.33		St Malachy's Primary School	Dungannon	17.00
Steelstown Voluntary Maintained Primary School	Derry	20.90		St Malachy's Primary School (Camlough)	Newry	21.77
Tattygar Primary School	Enniskillen	15.67		St Malachy's Primary School (Carnagat)	Newry	19.63
Termoncanice Primary School	Limavady	22.88		St Malachy's Primary School (Chapel Lane)	Armagh	21.67
Trench Road Primary School	Derry	21.93		St Malachy's Primary School (Whitecross)	Armagh	20.00
Tummery Primary School	Omagh	20.73		St Mary's Primary School	Stewartstown	19.83
North Eastern Education and Library Board				St Mary's Primary School	Cookstown	24.57
Altayeskey Primary School	Magherafelt	16.50		St Mary's Primary School	Ballygawley	21.14
Anahorish Primary School	Antrim	22.13		St Mary's Primary School	Fivemiletown	18.00
Ballyhackett Primary School	Coleraine	16.18		St Mary's Primary School	Banbridge	21.22

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
Barnish Primary School	Ballycastle	17.82		St Mary's Primary School	Aughnacloy	18.80
Braid Primary School	Ballymena	8.18		St Mary's Primary School (Annalong)	Newry	16.90
Carlane Primary School	Antrim	15.45		St Marys Primary School (Dechomet)	Castlewellan	18.48
Creggan Primary School	Antrim	18.83		St Mary's Primary School (Gawley's Gate)	Craigavon	18.71
Crossroads Primary School	Coleraine	19.14		St Mary's Primary School (Jerrettspass)	Newry	20.75
Glenann Primary School	Ballymena	15.00		St Mary's Primary School (Lisnagowan)	Dungannon	22.48
Glenravel Primary School	Ballymena	20.43		St Mary's Primary School (Lurgan)	Craigavon	18.50
Greenlough Primary School (St Mary's)	Ballymena	21.29		St Mary's Primary School (Maghera Road)	Dungannon	16.75
Holy Family Primary School	Magherafelt	22.33		St Mary's Primary School (Mullaghbawn)	Newry	23.46
Knocknagin Primary School	Magherafelt	14.50		St Mary's Primary School (Pomeroy)	Dungannon	18.10
Lourdes Primary School	Carrickfergus	22.50		St Mary's Primary School (Rathfriland)	Newry	19.05
Millquarter Primary School	Antrim	17.71		St Mary's Primary School (Tassagh)	Armagh	17.76
Moneynick Primary School	Antrim	17.67		St Mary's Primary School (Whites Road)	Dungannon	21.70
Mount St Michael's Primary School	Antrim	20.18		St Matthew's Primary School	Castlewellan	18.67
New Row Primary School	Magherafelt	20.50		St Michael's Primary School	Armagh	16.72
Seaview Primary School	Ballymena	17.00		St Michael's Primary School	Dromore	18.52
St Anne's Primary School	Ballymena	15.91		St Michael's Primary School (Newtownhamilton)	Newry	13.14

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Anthony's Primary School	Larne	20.22		St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Loughgall	21.89
St Bernard's Primary School	Newtownabbey	23.76		St Oliver Plunkett Primary School (Forkhill)	Newry	19.00
St Brigid's Primary School	Ballymoney	18.80		St Oliver's Primary School	Newry	17.00
St Brigid's Primary School (Broughshane Road)	Ballymena	22.21		St Patrick's Primary School	Armagh	21.14
St Brigid's Primary School (Cloughmills)	Ballymena	15.74		St Patrick's Primary School	Augher	18.17
St Brigid's Primary School (Knockloughrim)	Magherafelt	20.89		St Patrick's Primary School (Aughagallon)	Craigavon	18.25
St Brigid's Primary School (Tirkane)	Maghera	19.04		St Patrick's Primary School (Coalisland)	Dungannon	19.64
St Ciaran's Primary School	Ballymena	21.67		St Patrick's Primary School (Crossmaglen)	Newry	20.33
St Colmcille's Primary School	Ballymena	21.99		St Patrick's Primary School (Cullyhanna)	Newry	21.21
St Columba's Primary School (Draperstown)	Magherafelt	18.43		St Patrick's Primary School (Hilltown)	Newry	22.58
St Columba's Primary School (Garvagh)	Coleraine	20.80		St Patrick's Primary School (Killyman Road)	Dungannon	23.56
St Columba's Primary School (Kilrea)	Coleraine	21.66		St Patrick's Primary School (Loup)	Magherafelt	18.87
St Columb's Primary School	Magherafelt	23.50		St Patrick's Primary School (Lurgan)	Craigavon	22.36
St Colum's Primary School	Portstewart	20.22		St Patrick's Primary School (Magheralin)	Craigavon	18.75
St Comgall's Primary School	Antrim	21.86		St Patrick's Primary School (Mayobridge)	Newry	20.31

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (c) Maintained Primary Schools						
St Eoghan's Primary School	Magherafelt	21.50		St Patrick's Primary School (Moneymore)	Magherafelt	18.40
St James' Primary School	Newtownabbey	20.37		St Patrick's Primary School (Mullanahoe Road)	Dungannon	24.71
St John Bosco Primary School (Ballynease)	Ballymena	24.00		St Patrick's Primary School (Pomeroy Road)	Dungannon	20.33
St John's Primary School	Coleraine	22.25		St Patrick's Primary School (Rathfriland)	Newry	16.18
St John's Primary School (Carnlough)	Ballymena	20.94		St Patrick's Primary School (Rooney's Meadow)	Newry	20.59
St John's Primary School (Swatragh)	Maghera	22.13		St Paul's Primary School	Newry	20.52
St Joseph's Primary School	Crumlin	22.62		St Peter's Primary School (Bessbrook)	Newry	23.43
St Joseph's Primary School	Antrim	19.06		St Peter's Primary School (Moortown)	Cookstown	18.40
St Joseph's Primary School (Dunloy)	Ballymena	22.57		St Peter's Primary School (Moy)	Dungannon	16.89
St Macnisius' Primary School	Antrim	14.50		St Ronan's Primary School	Newry	25.52
St Macnissi's Primary School	Newtownabbey	22.71		St Teresa's Primary School	Armagh	14.17
St Macnissi's Primary School	Larne	22.12		St Teresa's Primary School	Lurgan	20.00
St Malachy's Primary School	Coleraine	22.00		Tannaghmore Primary School	Craigavon	20.86
St Mary's Primary School	Maghera	20.93				

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (d) Maintained Secondary Schools						
Belfast Education and Library Board				St Benedict's College	Randalstown	15.59
Christian Brothers School	Belfast	13.78		St Colm's High School	Magherafelt	15.15

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (d) Maintained Secondary Schools						
Corpus Christi College	Belfast	12.61		St Comgall's High School	Larne	11.36
De La Salle College	Belfast	13.70		St Joseph's College	Coleraine	13.47
Little Flower Girls' School	Belfast	14.06		St Mary's College	Ballymena	13.32
Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School	Belfast	14.26		St Patrick's Co-educational Comprehensive College	Maghera	14.73
St Gemma's High School	Belfast	12.58		St Patrick's College	Ballymena	15.30
St Genevieve's High School	Belfast	14.76		St Paul's College	Coleraine	14.99
St Joseph's College	Belfast	12.03		St Pius X College	Magherafelt	14.80
St Louise's Comprehensive College	Belfast	13.70		South Eastern Education and Library Board		
St Patrick's College	Belfast	14.59		De La Salle Secondary School	Downpatrick	12.91
St Rose's High School	Belfast	13.69		St Colman's High School	Ballynahinch	13.40
Western Education and Library Board				St Colmcille's High School	Crossgar	15.80
Dean Brian Maguirc College	Omagh	14.35		St Colm's High School	Belfast	13.42
Holy Cross College	Strabane	15.54		St Columbanus' College	Bangor	14.41
Immaculate Conception College	Derry	14.11		St Columba's College	Newtownards	11.13
Sacred Heart College	Omagh	15.00		St Malachy's High School	Castlewellan	13.74
St Aidan's High School	Enniskillen	13.74		St Mary's High School	Downpatrick	14.29
St Brigid's College	Derry	13.53		St Patrick's High School	Lisburn	12.52
St Cecilia's College	Derry	15.08		Southern Education and Library Board		

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (d) Maintained Secondary Schools						
St Comhghall's College	Enniskillen	14.54		Drumcree College	Portadown	12.43
St Eugene's College	Enniskillen	12.89		Holy Trinity College	Cookstown	14.85
St Eugene's High School	Castlederg	11.23		Lismore Comprehensive School	Craigavon	15.39
St Fanchea's College	Enniskillen	14.59		St Brigid's High School	Armagh	13.24
St John's High School	Omagh	9.99		St Catherine's College	Armagh	14.19
St Joseph's Boys' School	Derry	14.25		St Ciaran's High School	Dungannon	14.48
St Joseph's College	Enniskillen	14.69		St Columban's College	Newry	13.12
St Mary's College	Derry	14.85		St Joseph's Boys' High School	Newry	16.69
St Mary's College (Irvinestown)	Enniskillen	12.06		St Joseph's College (Coalisland)	Dungannon	13.54
St Mary's High School	Enniskillen	9.60		St Joseph's College (Crossmaglen)	Newry	14.31
St Mary's Limavady	Limavady	13.82		St Mark's High School	Newry	13.75
St Patrick's & St Brigid's High School	Derry	14.95		St Mary's High School	Newry	15.61
St Patrick's College	Derry	12.77		St Mary's High School (Lurgan)	Craigavon	15.66
St Peter's High School	Derry	10.46		St Patrick's College	Dungannon	15.54
North Eastern Education and Library Board				St Patrick's High School	Banbridge	13.50
Cross and Passion College	Ballycastle	13.96		St Patrick's High School	Keady	14.77
Edmund Rice College	Newtownabbey	13.48		St Paul's High School	Newry	14.99
Our Lady of Lourdes High School	Ballymoney	13.19		St Paul's Junior High School	Craigavon	13.82

School Name	Town/city	PTR		Name	Town/city	PTR
(b) (d) Maintained Secondary Schools						
St Aloysius High School	Ballymena	6.24				

PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO AVERAGES

	Primary	Post-Primary ¹
Controlled	20.43	14.07
Maintained	20.51	14.11

1 Excludes Grammar Schools

Pupil:Teacher Ratio

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of classes in each school which exceed her Department's recommended pupil:teacher ratio, broken down by sector.

(AQW 6470/10)

Minister of Education: I ngach bunscoil agus i ngach iarbhunscoil, tá na scoileanna féin freagrach, trí úsáid a gcuid buiséad tarmhigthe as cóimheas daltaí le múinteoirí agus as méideanna ranga a chinneadh. Cuimsíonn an fhreagracht seo líon na múinteoirí agus líon na foirne neamh-mhúinteoireachta, lena n-áirítear cúntóirí ranga, a chinneadh.

In all primary and post-primary schools the responsibility for determining the actual pupil/teacher ratio and class sizes rests with the schools themselves through use of their delegated budgets. This includes determining the number of teachers and non-teaching staff including classroom assistants.

Primary schools do have a statutory obligation under Article 16(2) of the Education Order (NI) 1998 and the Class Sizes in Primary Schools Regulations (NI) 2000 to ensure that class sizes at Foundation Stage (Years 1 and 2) and Key Stage 1 (Years 3 and 4) do not exceed 30 pupils. Education and Library Boards are responsible for providing any additional funding to eligible schools to enable them to meet this obligation. However, the 2000 Regulations allow boards to direct that exceptions may be allowed in the cases of: a direction by an admissions appeal tribunal; a direction by a board to admit a child to a specified school; a school attendance order; and a statement of special educational needs.

The latest information available comes from the 2009 annual school census and indicates that 75 primary schools have one class exceeding the limit at Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1, and 1 primary school has two classes which exceed the limit. These represent 38 controlled, 33 Maintained and 5 Grant Maintained Integrated schools.

St Patrick's College, Banbridge

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a new build for St Patrick's College, Banbridge, following the new build report from the project consultants and the review of capital projects awaiting approval by her Department.

(AQW 6471/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-athbhreithniú caipitil ar siúl agus tá m'fheidhmeannaigh ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú, a ghaiste is féidir. Mar gheall ar thábhacht an táisc seo, áfach, tá sé ríthábhachtach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar breithniú iomlán ar gach tionscadal, sula ndéanfar aon chinneadh. Níl mé in ann, mar sin, nuashonrú a thabhairt ar an soláthar le haghaidh foirgneamh nua do Choláiste Phádraig, Droichead na Banna.

The review of all capital projects in planning is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project before a decision is taken. I am not, therefore, in a position at present to provide an update on the provision of a new build for St Patrick's College, Banbridge.

2010-11 Budget

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education if she can confirm that there will be no loss of (i) teaching staff; and (ii) classroom assistants in the Southern Education and Library Board area, in light of her Department's 2010-11 budget.

(AQW 6482/10)

Minister of Education: Mar aitheantas ar an ról lárnach a imríonn an lucht oibre scoile i mo leasuithe oideachais a sholáthar ar an talamh, bhí sé i gcónaí mar thosaíocht agam seirbhísí túslíne a chosaint.

In recognition of the central role played by the school workforce in delivering my educational reforms on the ground, my priority has always been to protect frontline services.

In the 2010-11 budget I have increased the budgets which go directly to schools by 1.9%. In real terms this has meant that school budgets have increased from £1,106m in 2009-10 to £1,127m in 2010-11: a rise of £21m.

At the school level, under the Local Management of Schools funding arrangements, every school then receives an overall delegated budget. Boards of Governors and Principals determine their own spending needs and priorities against this budget, which includes the setting of school workforce staffing complements.

2010-11 Budget

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education to detail the cuts in services at the Southern Education and Library Board, in light of her Department's 2010-11 budget.

(AQW 6484/10)

Minister of Education: Cuireadh a leithdháiltf buiséid don bhliain 2010-11 in iúl do Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus is í an chéad chéim eile den phróiseas seo ná go gclineann gach Bord cad é mar a sholáthróidh siad seirbhísí oideachais agus tacaíocht do scoileanna ina gceantair faoi seach leis na sócmhainní a leithdháileadh orthu.

Education and Library Boards have been notified of their budget allocations for 2010-11 and the next step in the process is for each Board to determine how they will deliver education services and provide support to schools in each of their respective areas within the resources allocated to them..

In determining these plans, the Education and Library Boards will be expected to deliver on a number of key targets determined by my Department and to ensure that, as far as possible, the budget reductions do not impact on core services for children and youth.

These plans will be submitted to my Department in the coming weeks for approval. It is therefore not possible at this stage to detail any of the proposed cuts in services that the Southern Education and Library Board may propose.

Killard House Special School, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education what consideration she has given to making the tarmacked play area of Killard House Special School, Newtownards, available for use by the local community and youth club.

(AQW 6496/10)

Minister of Education: Under Article 140 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, schools are encouraged to make their premises available (when not required by or in connection with the school) for use by members of the community.

I am committed to promoting the wider use of school premises outside of normal school hours to meet the needs of pupils, families and the wider community. The working group established by my Department to explore ways in which community access to school facilities can be increased has recently submitted its final report. The report's recommendations, designed to help inform policy and operations with regards to enhancing community use of school premises, are currently being considered within the Department.

Ós rud é go bhfuil na háitrimh ar Killard House Special School, Baile Nua na hArda, folamh faoi láthair, tá sé de dhualgas ar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt, i gcomhréir lena dhualgas reachtúla agus lena oibleagáidí airgeadais, cinneadh a dhéanamh ar an phlásóg imeartha a chur ar fáil don phobal áitiúil agus don chlub áitiúil don ógra.

As the premises at Killard House Special School, Newtownards, are currently vacant, the decision on whether to make the play area available for use by a local community and youth club is a matter for the South Eastern Education and Library Board, in line with their statutory duties and financial obligations.

Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her revised answer to AQW 5788/10, to list the integrated schools which have not achieved the required minority percentage enrolment for the last (i) ten years; (ii) seven years; (iii) six years; (iv) five years; (v) four years; (vi) three years; (vii) two years; and (viii) one year.

(AQW 6510/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach sa tábla seo thíos na scoileanna comhtháite nár ghlac 30% dá gcuid daltaí ón phobal mionlaigh le linn tréimhse de 10 mbliana ón bhliain 2000/01 go 2009/10. Leagtar amach sa tábla fosta céadatan na ndaltaí a glacadh ón phobal mionlaigh.

The following table sets out the integrated schools which have not drawn 30% of their pupils from the minority community over the 10 year period from 2000/01 to 2009/10. The table also set out what percentage of pupils are drawn from the minority community

Schools which have transformed to integrated status should demonstrate the ability to achieve a minimum of 10% of their first year intake from the minority community and the potential to achieve 30% in the longer term.

Table showing actual % enrolment of pupils drawn from the minority community where the school is situated.

School	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01
Priory College	10.4	10.7	4.73	6.18	7.63	6.69	5.26	5.38	5.0	5.0
Fort Hill College	7.76	7.4	7.71	8.99	8.61	8.51	9.45	8.77	8.0	7.0
Bangor Central IPS	13.14	12.7	10.14	8.38	8.05	8.65	9.02	8.23	6.0	5.0
Round Tower IPS	26.03	25.8	24.02	15.58	25.0	20.31	17.7			

School	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01
Portaferry IPS	24.62	20.5	21.79	25.00	16.47	27.38	19.77			
Strangford College	24.95	24.1	24.85	24.18	26.35	27.37				
Kilbroney IPS	23.15	23.8	20.0	20.21	22.34	26.09				
Glencraig IPS	17.35	16.40	15.35	12.83	12.8	10.16				
All Children's IPS	20.28	21.1	24.62	24.49	28.42					
Forge IPS	25.97	26.0	20.80	19.42						
Maine IPS	28.7	28.0	20.45	12.86						
Oakgrove Integrated College	26.53	24.6	28.83							
Drumragh College	27.20	26.0	27.35							
Cliftonville IPS	20.97	18.1								
Oakgrove IPS	28.31	28.8								
Ballymoney IPS	3.53									
Carhill IPS	25.0									
Fort Hill IPS	4.26									
Portadown IPS	26.18									
Parkhall Integrated College	2.22									
North Coast Integrated College	26.53									
Groarty IPS	28.1									

Surplus Places in Preschool

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education how many surplus places there are in pre-school in the current academic year.

(AQW 6522/10)

Minister of Education: Is é líon na n-áiteanna barrachais san earnáil réamhscolaíochta sa bhliain acadúil reatha ná 156. Sholáthar na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an t-eolas seo agus baineann sé leis an earnáil reachtúil amháin.

The number of surplus places in the pre-school sector in the current academic year is 156. The information has been supplied by the Education and Library Boards and relates to the statutory sector only.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education to outline the exact figures proposed in her funding cuts for (i) schools and youth services community relations programmes; (ii) the 26 community relations organisations; and (iii) for her assessment of the impact of this decrease on the implementation of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

(AQW 6524/10)

Minister of Education: Existing Community Relations funding schemes were terminated on 31 March 2010.

I have had to balance a range of education priorities against the need to achieve efficiencies but in recognition of the continued need for good relations I have sought to retain a funding stream and have made provision of £1.1m for 2010/11

To facilitate the winding up of existing schemes, short term allocations have been made to ELBs, Youth Council and the 26 community relations organisations. The bulk of the funding for this year will be used in preparation for implementation of the new Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy which I plan to implement in the current financial year.

At this time I am unable to give precise details of the allocations, but it will not be possible to continue to fund all organisations at the 2009/10 level.

Our schools have an important role to play in relation to community relations. Citizenship is integrated across the revised curriculum, with Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at primary level and Learning for Life and Work at post primary level providing additional opportunities to address equality and diversity issues and promote good relations. Equality and inclusion should be the cornerstones of an education system which enables every learner to fulfil his or her potential.

Agus é a chur san áireamh, tá polasaithe tugtha ar aghaidh agam cheana féin, amhail Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith: Ag Tacú le Daltaí ó Thíortha Eile agus tograí comhairliúcháin ar an Bealach chun Tosaigh do Riachtanais Oideachais Speisialta, agus cuireann siad go léir leis an chur chuige níos leithne atá riachtanach anois chun caidreamh a fheabhsú idir pobail. Cuireadh cistiú de bhreis ar £200m ar fáil chun tacú leis na cláir seo. Chuir mé £90 breise ar fáil do gach dalta bunscoile fosta- is é sin, méadú de 3.1% i gcomparáid leis an fhigiúr don bhliain a chuaigh thart.

With this in mind I have already brought forward policies, such as Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomer Pupils and consultation proposals on the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs, all of which contribute to the broader approach which is now required to improving relations between communities. Funding in excess of £200m has been made available to support these programmes. I have also made available an additional £90 per primary pupil – an increase of 3.1% compared to last year.

The programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is in the process of being developed, but at this stage it is my assessment that the range of policies which I am bringing forward will make a significant contribution to this work. We are in a new era of sharing and community relations work in schools must evolve in line with other developments and encompass a wider approach to contribute to addressing good relations.

Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to replace the mobile classroom units at Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena with permanent school buildings.

(AQW 6540/10)

Minister of Education: I bhfómhar na bliana 2009, d'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal oibre ollchaipitil. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú caipitil le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

In the autumn of 2009, I announced a review of all proposed major capital work projects. The capital review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and the management of the schools estate. In the current economic climate the review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer. In light of this it is important that we validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term.

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops, these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

As the review is currently ongoing, I cannot at this time provide a timeframe for work to commence on any new build projects, including the potential project for Braidside Integrated Primary School.

Capital Builds

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Education to list the schools which have had capital builds approved by her Department but where the building work has not yet started, including the date of approval.

(AQW 6545/10)

Minister of Education: Tá Plean Soláthair Infheistíochta (PSI) na Roinne bunaithe ar réimse fógraí intinne chun bogadh ar aghaidh le tionscadail foirgnimh nua.

The Department's Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) is based on a series of announcements of intention to move forward with a number of new build projects.

Approval to proceed to construction is only given once the appraisal and planning stages have been successfully completed and where the project can be afforded within the resource available.

I attach a list of the projects on the IDP that are still in planning and the date of their announcement.

School Name	Project Details	Date Of Announcement
Artigarvan P.S. Strabane	New school on existing site	March 2006
Arvalee / Cranny Special School Omagh	New school on existing site	March 2006
Ballykelly P.S. Limavady	New school on existing site	March 2006
Ballymoney HS	New school on existing site	April 2004
Bangor G.S.	New school on new site	March 2006
Belmont Special School Derry	New school on existing site	April 2004

School Name	Project Details	Date Of Announcement
Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint	New school on existing extended site	April 2004
Coláiste Feirste, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	March 2006
Coranny & Cornagague P.S. Roslea	New school on new site	April 2004
Dean Maguirc College Carrickmore	New school on new site	March 2006
Devenish College Enniskillen	New school on new site	April 2004
Dromintee P.S. Killeavey	New school on existing extended site	April 2004
Dromore Central P.S.	New school on new site	April 2004
Ebrington P.S. Derry	New school on existing site	March 2006
Edenderry N.S./Glenwood P.S. Belfast	New school on new site	March 2006
Edendork P.S. Dungannon	New school on new site	March 2006
Eglinton P.S. Derry	New school on existing site	March 2006
Enniskillen Model P.S.	New school on existing site	March 2006
Foyle & Londonderry College	New school on new site	March 2006
Glastry College Ballyhalbert	New school on existing extended site	March 2006
Greenwood Assessment Centre Belfast	New school on existing site	April 2004
Holy Family P.S. Magherafelt	New school on existing extended site	February 2003
Holy Trinity College Cookstown	New school on existing site	April 2004
Hollywood P.S.	New school on new site	March 2006
Knockbreda H.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	March 2006
Knockevin Special School Downpatrick	New school on existing site	March 2006
Lagan College Belfast (PPP)	Extension & Refurbishment	March 2002
Limegrove / Glasvey Special School Limavady	New school on existing site	April 2004
Little Flower Girls S.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	March 2006
Loreto Grammar Omagh	New school on existing site	April 2004
Lurgan College	New school on existing site	March 2006
Magherafelt P.S.	New school on new site	April 2004
Methodist College Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	March 2006

School Name	Project Details	Date Of Announcement
Mitchell House Special School Belfast	New school on existing site	April 2004
New Buildings PS. – Derry	New school on existing site	March 2006
Omagh I.PS.	New school on new site	February 2003
Parkhall College Antrim	New school on existing site	March 2006
Portadown College	New school on existing site	March 2006
Priory College Holywood	New school on new site	March 2006
Rainey Endowed School Magherafelt	New school on existing site	April 2004
Scoil Na Fuisseoige Belfast	New school on existing site	March 2006
Springhill PS. Belfast	New school on existing site	February 2003
St Bronagh's PS. Rostrevor	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Clare's Abbey PS. Newry	New school on new site	February 2000
St Colman's PS. Lambeg	New school on existing site	April 2004
St Columba's PS. Straw	New school on new site	March 2006
St Columbanus College Bangor	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Columbkille's PS. Carrickmore	New school on existing site	April 2004
St Conor's PS. Omagh	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Joseph's Convent PS. Newry	New school on existing site	February 2003
St Joseph's PS. Madden	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Louis G.S. Kilkeel	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Mary's PS Banbridge.	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Mary's PS.Newcastle	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Oliver Plunkett PS. Forkhill	New school on new site	April 2004
St Patrick's Academy Dungannon	New school on existing site	February 2003
St Patrick's College Banbridge	New school on existing site	March 2006
St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Extension & Refurbishment	March 2006
St Paul's PS. Irvinestown	New school on existing site	April 2004
St Teresa's PS. Lurgan	New school on existing extended site	February 2003
Strand / Sydenham PS. Belfast	New school on existing site	April 2004
Strandtown PS. Belfast	New school on existing site	March 2006
Strathearn G.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	February 2003
Tannaghmore PS. Lurgan	New school on existing site	March 2006

School Name	Project Details	Date Of Announcement
Taughmonagh PS Belfast	New school on existing site	June 2007
The High School Ballynahinch	New school on existing site	March 2006
Tor Bank Special Belfast (PPP)	New school on existing site	March 2002
Victoria College Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	March 2006
Whitehouse PS Newtownabbey	New school on existing site	March 2006

In the autumn of 2009, I announced a review of all proposed major capital work projects. The capital review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and the management of the schools estate. In the current economic climate the review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer. In light of this it is important that we validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term.

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops, these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

As the review is currently ongoing, I cannot at this time provide a timeframe for approving the commencement of construction of any of the announced projects still in planning.

Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Education, following the implementation of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education's proposals for the North Down and East Belfast constituency, whether students from Bangor will no longer be entitled to free school transport to Belfast.
(AQW 6546/10)

Minister of Education: Rinneadh tograí an Choimisiúin d'Oideachas Caitliceach gan spleáchas leis an Roinn Oideachais, agus tá siad á meas laistigh den earnáil faoi láthair. Go dtí go gcríochnófar an próiseas seo agus go dtí go gcfórfaidh an Roinn na tograí deiridh, ní féidir a rá cen tionchar a bheadh acu, más ann, ar an teidlíocht le haghaidh cúnamh iompar scoile.

The proposals of the Commission for Catholic Education have been made independently of the Department of Education, and are currently being consulted upon within the sector. Until this process is completed and the final proposals considered by the Department, it is not possible to say what effect, if any, there will be on entitlement for school transport assistance.

Every School a Good School - The School Improvement Policy

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the implementation of 'Every School a Good School - The School Improvement Policy' in its first year of operation; (ii) to list the schools that have entered the formal intervention process since the launch of the policy; and (iii) to detail how these schools are being supported.
(AQW 6577/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach go soiléir i mo pholasaí um fheabhsúchán scoile an gá le beart a ghlacadh chun caighdeán a ardú agus chun dul i ngeic leis an bhearna dhoghlachtha sa ghnóthachtáil a mhair le rófhada. Cuimsítear ann, fosta, tiomantas soiléir do thacú le scoileanna chun torthaí a fheabhsú do dhaltáí agus aithníonn sé lárnacht na múinteoirí, a dtacaíonn ceannairí éifeachtacha scoile leo, maidir le cuidiú a thabhairt do dhaltáí chun a lánchumas a bhaint amach.

My school improvement policy sets out clearly the need for action to raise standards and to tackle the unacceptable gap in achievement that has persisted for far too long. It also contains a clear commitment to supporting schools to improve outcomes for pupils and recognises the centrality of classroom teachers, supported by effective school leaders, in helping pupils to reach their full potential.

Good progress has been made in ensuring that the education support bodies maintain a clear focus on school performance and respond quickly and appropriately to help schools deliver sustainable self-improvement but it is important to make clear that our progress in ensuring that our schools get the support they need will be much greater once we establish the Education and Skills Authority in line with the Executive's commitment.

The school improvement policy includes a requirement to provide focused support for schools which, as a result of inspection, are found to be offering less than satisfactory provision for their pupils. This support is provided through the Formal Intervention Process. A list of schools that have entered the Process is provided in the table below

School

- Ballee Community High School, Ballymena
- Ballygolan Primary School, Belfast
- Beechfield Primary School, Belfast
- Bunscoil an Traonaigh, Lisnaskea
- Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan
- Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain, Belfast
- Bushmills Primary School
- Cliftonville Integrated Primary School
- Crumlin Integrated College
- Dundonald High School
- Gaelscoil an Lonnáin, Belfast
- Gaelscoil na Daróige, Derry
- Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh
- Gaelscoil na Móna, Belfast
- Knockbreda High School
- Lisneal College, Derry
- St Bernard's Primary School, Glengormley
- St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor

All schools receiving support through the Formal Intervention Process have committed to working to deliver agreed action plans, quality-assured by ETI, that are designed to address the areas for improvement identified through inspection. All are receiving tailored support from the relevant Education & Library Board, supported where appropriate by the relevant sectoral body. The focus throughout this process is on ensuring that pupils receive the highest possible quality of teaching and learning so that they can achieve to their full potential.

Irish-medium and Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 6090/10, whether the list of schools provided includes all primary and post-primary Irish-medium and integrated schools.
(AQW 6582/10)

Minister of Education: The list provided previously included all Irish medium and all grant-maintained integrated primary and post-primary schools that were open in 2009/10 and submitted a teacher numbers return in 2008/09. Controlled integrated schools were not included in the previous answer. The pupil-teacher ratios for these schools are given in the tables below.

Controlled Integrated Primary Schools	Location	Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Cliftonville Integrated Primary School	Belfast	19.2
Forge Integrated Primary School	Belfast	22.3
Groarty Primary School	Derry	10.3
Ballycastle Integrated Primary School	Ballycastle	16.6
Carhill Integrated Primary School	Coleraine	20.0
Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School	Ballymena	13.0
Glengormley Integrated Primary School	Newtownabbey	17.6
Rathenraw Integrated Primary School	Antrim	12.8
Round Tower Integrated Primary School	Antrim	20.1
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	Newcastle	20.4
Annsborough Primary School	Castlewellan	14.7
Bangor Central Primary School	Bangor	21.0
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	Holywood	23.8
Kircubbin Primary School	Newtownards	20.2
Portaferry Integrated Primary School	Newtownards	14.6
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	Newry	19.4
Controlled integrated primary schools average		19.1

Controlled integrated post-primary schools	Location	Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Crumlin Integrated College	Crumlin	12.5
Fort Hill College	Lisburn	13.5
Priory College	Holywood	13.2
Brownlow Integrated College	Craigavon	13.5
Controlled integrated post-primary schools average		13.3

Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to outline the process of funding for integrated schools and what additional resources are available over and above the funded budget.

(AQW 6585/10)

Minister of Education: De réir na Scéime Comh-mhaoinithe, maoinítear gach scoil dheontaschúnta faoi shocrúithe Bhainistíocht Áitiúil na Scoileanna, a chinntíonn go maoinítear scoileanna ar bhonn cothrom comhsheasmhach, beag beann ar a suíomh tíreolaíoch, ar a saghas bainistíochta nó ar an earnáil ina bhfuil sí páirteach.

In accordance with the Common Funding Scheme, all grant-aided schools are funded under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, ensuring schools are funded on a consistent and equitable basis, regardless of their geographical location, management type or sector.

In determining the budget for individual schools, controlled integrated schools are treated the same as other controlled and maintained schools with similar characteristics.

Grant Maintained Integrated schools receive specific funding within the Common Funding Formula to assist them in meeting their additional responsibilities in respect of the payment of VAT costs, landlord maintenance expenditure and the administration costs associated with the running of their schools. Each of the five Education and Library Boards meet these additional spending commitments centrally for those controlled and maintained schools located within their area.

DE also provides funding to help schools with the transformation process. The budget for 2010/11 is £255,000. . This assists schools in the initial stages of the transformation process and with the employment of a teacher from the minority community in the school, to assist with religious education.

School Building Projects

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to list all Irish-medium school building projects which started in the last three years, including the total budget for each project.

(AQW 6587/10)

Minister of Education: Ní dhearnadh aon tionscadail oibreacha ollchaipitil i nGaelscoileanna sna trí bliana a chuaigh thart. Faomhadh roinnt tionscadal oibreacha mionchaipitil sna trí bliana a chuaigh thart agus tá siad liostaithe thíos.

There have been no major capital works projects undertaken in Irish-medium schools in the past three years. A number of minor capital works projects have been approved in the last three years and are listed below.

School Name	Project Description	Project Budget
Bunscoil an Chaistil	Temporary accommodation	£184,080.00
Bunscoil an Lúir	Fencing	£18,212.50
Bunscoil an Lúir	Temporary accommodation	£54,258.75
Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Temporary accommodation	£87,874.81
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	DDA works	£22,000.00
Coláiste Feirste	Upgrade of floor structure	£38,405.71
Coláiste Feirste	Heating upgrade	£58,500.00
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	Extension of intruder alarm	£2,300.00
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	Temporary accommodation	£308,144.80
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	Development of playground	£49,450.00
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Temporary accommodation	£38,187.50
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Temporary accommodation	£110,993.40
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Telephone system	£799.00
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Extension of intruder alarm	£616.88
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Access control	£6,587.52

School Name	Project Description	Project Budget
Gaelscoil Uí Néill	Temporary accommodation	£105,255.35
Scoil an Droichid	Provision of school meals accommodation	£100,000.00

Stanley Goudie

School Building Projects

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to list all school building projects which started in the last three years, including the total budget for each project.

(AQW 6589/10)

Minister of Education: The table below provides details of all major school building projects which have started since April 2007.

School	Project Details	Capital Value (£M)
Abbey G.S. Newry	New school	16.2
Ashfield Girls H.S., Belfast	New school	23.4
Ballinderry P.S.	New school	2.6
Ballymacrickett P.S. Crumlin		2.9
Banbridge Academy	Extension & Refurbishment	17.9
Belfast Model School for Boys	New school	32.7
Belfast Model School for Girls	New school	30.9
Brookefield Special School Moira	New school	5.2
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	New school	11.1
Drumrane P.S. Dungiven	New school	1.0
Glendhu Nursery School Belfast	New school	0.6
Grosvenor G.S.	New school	27.8
Lisbellaw P.S.	New school	2.3
Lisnagelvin P.S. Derry	New school	5.5
Lisneal College, Derry	New school	14.2
Magherafelt H.S.	New school	10.5
Moorfields P.S. Ballymena	New school	2.1
Mount Lourdes G.S. Enniskillen	Extension & Refurbishment	4.0
Orangefield P.S. Belfast	New school	7.0
Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Knock	New school	23.0
Pond Park P.S. Lisburn	New school	4.9
Ravenscroft Nursery School, Belfast	New school	0.9
St Catherine's College, Armagh	Extension	0.5

School	Project Details	Capital Value (£M)
St Cecilia's College, Derry	New school	19.8
St Dominic's H.S. Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	18.5
St Joseph's PS. Carryduff	New school	5.8
St Mary's College, Derry	New school	19.8
St Mary's PS. Portglenone	New school	3.9
St Patrick's & St Brigid's PS. Ballycastle	New school	3.9
St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick	New school	16.8
St Patrick's PS. Saul	New school	1.5
St Peter's PS. Cloughreagh	New school	3.2
Templepatrick PS.	New school	3.9
Towerview PS. Bangor	New school	3.6
Victoria PS. Ballyhalbert	New school	1.5
Waringstown PS.	Extension & Refurbishment	1.4

Ní féidir liosta dá shamhail de na miontionscadail foirgnimh scoile a sholáthar mar tá barraíocht tionscadal le lua agus bheadh costas díréireach i gceist leis an eolas a iarradh a bhailiú. Is féidir, áfach, sonraí a sholáthar ar an chaiteachas iomlán caipitil de £224,389,000 ar mhiontionscadail chaipitil sna trí bliana a chuaigh thart.

With regard to minor school building projects it is not possible to provide a similar list as there is too great a number and to do so would be a very time consuming exercise for officials and the costs incurred would be disproportionate to the information requested. It has, however, been possible to provide details of the total capital spend on minor capital projects for the last three financial years, which is £224,389,000

Nursery Class at Annaclone Primary School

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of a new nursery class at Annaclone Primary School.

(AQW 6606/10)

Minister of Education: Tá feidmeannaigh na Roinne ag bailiú gach eolais a bhaineann leis an togra le haghaidh mo chomhairliúcháin. Tá súil agam go mbeidh mé in ann cinneadh a dhéanamh ar an togra seo roimh i bhfad.

Departmental Officials are currently assembling all information relevant to the proposal for my consideration. I hope to be in a position to make a decision on this proposal in the near future.

Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 6283/10, how much funding Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School in the Colin area received for (i) special needs provision; and (ii) children with dyslexia, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 6612/10)

Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that funding provided for the numbers of children identified as requiring special needs provision, at all stages of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special

Educational Needs, in Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School in each of the last two financial years is as follows:-

	2008/09 (£)	2009/10 (£)
Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School	104,218	97,550

The Chief Executive has advised that the above figures do not include additional support provided through the Board's Outreach Service which operates from Beechlawn School throughout the SEELB or any funding which may have been provided through the Integrated Development Fund.

It is not possible to specify the amount of funding in respect of children with dyslexia as this service is provided by the Board's Outreach Service.

Community Relations Budget

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education what formal or informal consultation was undertaken by her Department before the decision was taken to cut the community relations budget.

(AQW 6613/10)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Existing Community Relations funding schemes were terminated on 31 March 2010. In letters dated 25 March 2009 and 3 August 2009 to the ELBs, Youth Council and 26 core funded groups, the Department stated the intention to introduce a new policy and to notify organisations that the current allocation of funding would cease. As part of this process informal consultation was undertaken by officials with the organisations concerned.
- (ii) Dá bharr sin, ba chóir nach gcuirfí isteach ar aon tionscadail a fuair cistiú faoi scéimeanna roimhe seo. Fuair gach eagraíocht atá i dtreis rabhadh dóthanach chun tionscadail reatha a chur i gcrích nó sruthanna malartacha cistithe a fháil.
- (ii) Consequently, there should be no projects that received funding under the previous schemes that should be affected. All affected organisations had sufficient notice to bring existing projects to a conclusion or to seek alternative funding streams.

Community Relations Budget

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education to list the projects in each constituency which will be affected by the 70% cut to the community relations budget within her Department.

(AQW 6614/10)

Minister of Education:

- (ii) Existing Community Relations funding schemes were terminated on 31 March 2010. In letters dated 25 March 2009 and 3 August 2009 to the ELBs, Youth Council and 26 core funded groups, the Department stated the intention to introduce a new policy and to notify organisations that the current allocation of funding would cease. As part of this process informal consultation was undertaken by officials with the organisations concerned.
- (ii) Dá bharr sin, ba chóir nach gcuirfí isteach ar aon tionscadail a fuair cistiú faoi scéimeanna roimhe seo. Fuair gach eagraíocht atá i dtreis rabhadh dóthanach chun tionscadail reatha a chur i gcrích nó sruthanna malartacha cistithe a fháil.
- (ii) Consequently, there should be no projects that received funding under the previous schemes that should be affected. All affected organisations had sufficient notice to bring existing projects to a conclusion or to seek alternative funding streams.

Free School Meals

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education (i) how many children are currently in receipt of free school meals; and (ii) how many additional children could receive free school meals after she has allocated additional funding, in each constituency.

(AQW 6623/10)

Minister of Education: The number of pupils in each constituency who were entitled to free school meals as recorded by the October 2009 School Census was as follows:

Constituency	Number of Pupils Entitled to Free School Meals			
	Primary ¹	Post-primary	Special	Total
Belfast East	1,187	846	70	2,103
Belfast North	2,781	2,256	79	5,116
Belfast South	1,126	894	361	2,381
Belfast West	3,394	2,938	140	6,472
East Antrim	958	797	135	1,890
East Derry	1,572	1,180	104	2,856
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1,397	1,547	140	3,084
Foyle	3,635	3,194	143	6,972
Lagan Valley	1,056	670	172	1,898
Mid Ulster	1,638	1,427	17	3,082
Newry and Armagh	2,219	1,973	67	4,259
North Antrim	1,475	1,258	82	2,815
North Down	682	476	27	1,185
South Antrim	1,115	902	29	2,046
South Down	1,660	1,530	19	3,209
Strangford	970	602	111	1,683
Upper Bann	1,935	1,534	49	3,518
West Tyrone	2,051	1,739	139	3,929
Total	30,851	25,763	1,884	58,498

Note:

1. Primary includes years 1-7, nursery and reception classes.

As part of the budget allocations for education services for 2010/11 I was delighted to be able to make an additional £3 million available to extend the free school meals criteria. Families with children in full-time nursery places and/or primary schools in receipt of working tax credit and with a taxable income below £16,190 (in 2010/11), will now be able to ensure that their children receive a nutritious meal in the middle of the day. This will be introduced on a phased basis over two years with nursery, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils eligible from September 2010.

When the change is implemented in full it is estimated that an additional 20,000 children in nursery and primary school will be eligible for free school meals. It is not possible to break this figure down by constituency as the estimates were not done to that level of detail.

Má tá teaghlaigh i dteideal béilí saora scoile, tá siad i dteideal tairbhí eile fosta, lena n-áirítear deontais éidí scoile, agus mholfainn do gach teaghlach ísealioncaim a lántéidlíocht a éiliú.

Eligibility for free school meals also entitles families to other benefits, including school uniform grants and I would encourage all lower income families to claim their full entitlement.

Retired Teachers

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education what consultation has been carried out in relation to pension rates payable to retired teachers in 2010/11.

(AQW 6626/10)

Minister of Education: Public service pensions are increased under the provisions of the Pensions (increase) Act 1971 and Section 59 of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975.

The Treasury has detailed that the Minister of State (Pensions and the Ageing Society) has confirmed, benefits such as additional pensions would not be up-rated from April 2010 as the Retail Price Index was negative (-1.4%); therefore public service pensions would not be up-rated from April 2010.

Is í an Roinn Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, ina cáil mar ionadaí an NICS ar an Choiste Oifigiúil um Pinsin Ghairme (COPG), atá i gceannas ar a leithéid de shaincheistean agus tugann sí comhairle gurb í an Státchiste a shocraíonn an ráta agus nach bhfuil an ráta seo neamh-inchaibidle. Mar sin de, níl aon chomhairliúchán ar an phróiseas um méadú bliantúil pinsin.

The Department of Finance and Personnel, in their capacity as the NICS representative on the Official Committee on Occupational Pensions (OCOP), is the lead on any such issues and they advise the rate is set by the Treasury and this is non negotiable, therefore there is no consultation on the annual pension increase process.

Nursery School Places

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education whether she has any plans to increase the number of nursery school places available for the academic year 2010/11, given the oversubscription of places in the East Belfast constituency.

(AQW 6628/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an próiseas iontrála le haghaidh soláthar réamhscoile don scoilbhliain 2010/11 fós ar siúl. Chuir na Boird Oideachais an próiseas tosaigh iontrála i gcrích ar 30 Aibreán 2010, nuair a fuair tuismitheoirí litir a chuir in iúl dóibh cén suíomh inar glacadh lena bpáiste réamhscoile. Cuireadh in iúl do gach tuismitheoir nár glacadh lena pháiste ina chéad rogha scoile ar 30 Aibreán 2010, cá háit a bhfuil soláthar malartach fós ar fáil.

The admissions process to pre-school provision in the 2010/11 school year is still ongoing. The initial process of admissions was completed by the Education and Library Boards on 30 April 2010, when parents received a letter notifying them of the setting for which their pre-school child has been accepted. Parents of all children, unplaced in settings of their choice at 30 April 2010, were advised where alternative provision is still available.

Education and Library Boards are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at 30 April 2010. It is expected that this process will be completed by the end June 2010. Education and Library Boards will seek to extend the number of places in existing settings, where possible, or to admit to the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme new pre-school providers in the voluntary/private sector to address any shortfall.

In the 2009/10 school year the Department secured additional funding to meet demand for extra places. In order to maintain this increased level for the forthcoming school year an additional £300,000 of funding has been made available to Education and Library Boards.

The Department will continue to liaise with the Education and Library Boards to ensure that, as far as possible, demand for pre-school places is met.

Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena.

(AQW 6630/10)

Minister of Education: Mar is eol duit, d'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal molta oibre ollchaipitil i bhfómhar na bliana 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú caipitil le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

As you are aware, in the autumn of 2009, I announced a review of all proposed major capital work projects. The capital review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and the management of the schools estate. In the current economic climate the review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer. In light of this it is important that we validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term.

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops, these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

As the review is currently ongoing, I cannot at this time provide a timeframe for work to commence on any new build projects, including the potential project for Braidside Integrated Primary School.

State Funded Nursery Places

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education (i) to list the numbers and locations of state funded nursery places available in the Shantallow area for 2010/11; and (ii) to detail the number of applications for these places that were (a) received; and (b) rejected.

(AQW 6634/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthar in iúl go mionsonraítear sa tábla thíos (i) líonta agus suíomhanna na n-áiteanna stáitchistithe réamhscoile atá ar fáil do limistéar Sheantalaímh don bhliain 2010/11, agus (ii) líon na n-iarraitas ar na háiteanna seo (a) a fuarthas; agus (b) ar diúltaíodh dóibh.

The Western Education and Library Board have advised that (i) the numbers and locations of state funded nursery places available in the Shantallow area for 2010/11 and (ii) the number of applications for these places that were (a) received; and (b) rejected are as detailed in the table below.

(i)		(ii)	
Location	Number of Places Available	(a) Number of Applications Received	(b) Number of Applications Rejected
Shantallow East	52	84	32
Shantallow West	50	61	11

Classroom Assistants

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail her Department's policy in relation to the employment of classroom assistants.

(AQW 6642/10)

Minister of Education: Tá lucht oibre ag scoileanna i dtuaisceart na hÉireann atá ard-spreagtha, solúbtha agus tiomanta, rud a bhí ar cheann de na príomhchúiseanna le caighdeán oideachais a ardú.

Schools in the north of Ireland possess a highly motivated, flexible and committed workforce which has been one of the prime factors in raising educational standards.

To date my Department's policy framework has focused on the teaching workforce. I do however recognise the invaluable contribution provided by classroom assistants and my Department has provided significant funding for classroom assistants in Years 1 and 2 in primary schools.

Going forward, the School Workforce Review will examine the respective roles, responsibilities and the contribution of the differing skills and expertise of the entire school workforce. Recommendations flowing from this review will inform future policy, particularly regarding the non-teaching staff, of which classroom assistants form a vital component.

Whatever their role, my aim is to ensure that members of the school workforce have the skills and knowledge to do the best job they possibly can to ensure every child and young person has the opportunity to succeed.

Value Added Score at GCSE A-Level

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education to outline how the value-added score at (i) GCSE; and (ii) A-Level compares between (a) grammar schools; (b) non-grammar secondary schools; and (c) integrated schools.

(AQW 6649/10)

Minister of Education: San am i láthair, ní áiríonn an Roinn beart breisluacha comhtheacsúil do scoileanna. Mar chuid de Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith- beartas um fheabhsúchán scoile- tá an Roinn tiomanta do bheart breisluacha comhtheacsúil a fhorbairt, lena bheith in úsáid le bearta eile i bhfeidhmiúchán na scoileanna a mheas lena bheith comhthráthach le tabhairt isteach shocruithe na measúnachta athbhreithnithe.

The Department does not currently calculate a contextual value added measure for schools. The Department is committed as part of Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement - to develop a contextual value-added measure, to be used alongside other measures in assessing the performance of schools, to coincide with the introduction of the revised assessment arrangements.

Department for Employment and Learning

Careers Resource Centres

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he plans to review the Careers Resource Centres as proposed in the Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance 'Preparing for Success: A Strategy and Implementation Plan' in 2009.

(AQW 6439/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Currently there are two Careers Resource Centres operating in Northern Ireland, one in Belfast and the other in Londonderry. An independent review was completed in June 2009 and the report concluded that the Careers Resource Centre model is contributing positively to the delivery of careers services. The Department is currently considering the future potential for this approach.

Careers Resource Centres

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact of the Careers Resource Centres on adults over 25 years old.

(AQW 6440/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department's Careers Service is fully committed to monitoring and evaluating the impact of services.

In January 2008, my Department established two new Careers Resource Centres in Belfast and Londonderry. An independent review in June 2009 examined the impact of the Careers Resource Centres and one of the key findings was:

"Evidence both quantitative and qualitative supports the argument that the Resource Centres have succeeded, so far, in providing an improved service to increasing numbers of clients."

The review also reported that:

"Early findings from Careers Resource Centres show some promising results in terms of:

- increased levels of adult caller traffic;
- high levels of satisfaction from users of the service;
- new additional services being offered and delivered to young people and adults such as improved access to web-based services, new resource guides and some group work activities."

Figures show that there has been an increase in caller traffic since the establishment of the Resource Centres. Caller traffic has increased by 79% from 2008 to 2009 in Belfast and Londonderry. Adult caller traffic has increased by 54% in the same period. The Department defines an 'adult' as someone who is 18 years and over and unfortunately information is not available on adults over 25 specifically.

As a result of the service provided by the Resource Centres, a client satisfaction survey in 2009 reported that:

- 82.4% of respondents were more confident about their future.
- 75% of respondents were more motivated.
- 71.2% of respondents were more aware of what they have to offer to an employer.
- 62.9% of respondents knew more about how to get into training.
- 69.4% of respondents knew how to go about finding opportunities to learn.
- 66.7% of respondents knew how to go about finding a job.
- 71.2% of respondents knew how to plan for the future.

The Careers Service is currently working with colleagues in the UK Careers Policy Forum and the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network to agree longer term impact measures of careers guidance.

Adult Guidance Provision and Delivery

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how much has been spent on external consultants reviewing adult guidance provision and delivery in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10; (ii) to detail the tender specifications for consultants' reviews; (iii) to outline the findings of the reviews; and (iv) whether all reports have been published.

(AQW 6457/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: (i) Between 2007 and 2010, my Department has spent a total of £23,500 on external consultants reviewing adult guidance provision and delivery as follows:

- (a) 2007/2008 - Nil.
- (b) 2008/2009 - £13,580

(c) 2009/2010 - £9,920

(ii) The tender specification set out the following priorities to underpin the future delivery of adult careers guidance services:

1. To ensure the service offered is coherent with other publicly funded services and initiatives.
2. To ensure that the Adult Careers Guidance Service delivery is provided within a quality-assured framework that forms part of a continuous quality improvement strategy.
3. To ensure maximum impact from service delivery is achieved.
4. To ensure delivery on priority targets in line with DEL's specified aims and objectives.

(iii) The report identified the preferred option as 'DEL to retain an all age careers guidance service in-house and to outsource a suite of 'niche' adult careers guidance services to EGSA on a formal Service Level Agreement contract'.

(iv) The report 'Review of the Delivery of Adult Careers Guidance Services' (December 2009) is published on the Department's website www.delni.gov.uk. In addition, in 2007 the Centre for Guidance Studies was commissioned to carry out a piece of research exploring Adult Guidance Provision in Northern Ireland. This report is also available on my Department's website.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Quinn Insurance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she or her Department has had any discussions with Quinn Insurance in relation to saving jobs.

(AQW 6564/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): As Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment I have been closely involved with the developing situation at Quinn Insurance Limited since it was placed into Administration on the 30th March 2010.

Since then, I have held a number of meetings and had many discussions with my Ministerial counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, the senior management of Quinn Insurance, including the appointed administrators, as well as employee representatives in order to show my support and commitment to retain all of the employment in Northern Ireland.

Despite all of these efforts, the company administrators announced on 30th April 2010 that they were entering into a consultation process on a proposed redundancy programme affecting approximately 900 people from across the Quinn Insurance business in the UK and Ireland. Of the total redundancies announced, I understand that 179 relate directly to the Enniskillen Centre. A further 27 jobs are impacted in the Derrylin operation.

My concern and thoughts continue to be with the employees and their families affected by this situation and I will continue to work very closely with Invest NI to do everything possible to limit the impact of the proposed redundancies.

Wind Turbines

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he has had any contact with Northern Ireland Electricity in relation to waiving the charge for the connection of wind turbines on private property, thus encouraging the use of sustainable energy.

(AQW 6611/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Officials in my Department have been in contact with Northern Ireland Electricity in relation to the cost and timeliness of connection of wind turbines to the electricity network.

Connection charges must be cost reflective and it would be unacceptable for other electricity consumers in Northern Ireland to incur the costs of connecting wind turbines on private property. There are separate incentives to encourage renewable generation by means of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation.

There is a published Connection Charging Statement for connection to the electricity distribution system which is agreed with the Utility Regulator. A review of connection charges is planned by the Utility Regulator in the autumn of 2010.

Fuel Poverty

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Minister for Social Development regarding concerns that the 2010 fuel poverty targets have not been met.

(AQO 1194/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have not had any recent discussions with the Minister for Social Development on this issue. My Department is however on the Inter-departmental Group on Fuel Poverty that she chairs and which is charged with ensuring effective co-ordination of policies and actions to address fuel poverty.

In addition, my officials meet regularly with key fuel poverty stakeholders including the Consumer Council, National Energy Action and the Utility Regulator's office.

Investment: East Belfast

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures she has taken to attract business investment to East Belfast.

(AQO 1196/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between 2002-2003 and 2009 - 2010, Invest NI has issued almost 1,000 offers of assistance to businesses in East Belfast. These offers amounted to £140 million of support and generated total investment in the constituency of £951million.

The support covers the range of Invest NI assistance, with 207 offers made to externally-owned companies, including Citi and the development of the new Bombardier C-Series. Over 700 offers were made to the constituency's indigenous business base and over 700 new business starts were supported in the constituency between 2002-2003 and 2009 - 2010.

Invest NI's full range of support continues to be available to businesses in East Belfast to assist them in increasing export levels and stimulating a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. And through initiatives such as the Accelerated Support Fund and the Short Term Aid Scheme, we have continued to work proactively with local companies and entrepreneurs to help minimise the impact of the economic downturn.

Quinn Insurance

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on any discussions she has had with the Executive about asking the British and Irish Governments to underwrite any shortfall resulting from the Financial Regulator's concerns regarding Quinn Insurance.

(AQO 1197/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: On Friday 30th April 2010, the Board of Quinn Group released a statement that in view of the funding required to meet the solvency requirements laid down by the Irish Financial Regulator that the future of Quinn Insurance is probably best protected under new ownership. As a result, Invest NI officials had an urgent meeting with senior representatives from the Quinn Group on Wednesday 5th April 2010, to ensure that every effort is made to maintain the vital investment and employment in the Fermanagh and surrounding areas. Invest NI gave a commitment to set up an urgent meeting with the Irish Regulator which has been requested for next week.

I can also confirm that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have written to both the British and Irish governments asking that efforts are made by all agencies to mitigate the damaging financial and social impact of the planned redundancies at Quinn Insurance on both sides of the border.

Executive Subcommittees on the Economy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress is being made by the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy and for an outline of any actions or proposals it has made to date.

(AQO 1198/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I wrote to the Executive on 25 January 2010 with the proposal to establish an Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy. This was subsequently agreed on 15 April 2010 and I will be chairing the first meeting of the Sub-Committee on 20 May 2010.

Our first key task at that meeting will be to agree the steps that are required to develop an economic strategy to grow a dynamic and innovative economy.

Economic Growth

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she has taken to advance long-term economic growth.

(AQO 1199/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Growing a more dynamic, innovative economy remains a key priority for my Department and the wider Executive.

That is why DETI and Invest NI have prioritised improving private sector productivity by targeting support to attract foreign direct investment, encourage investment by local companies, promote research & development and exporting, and develop Northern Ireland's telecommunications infrastructure.

I also commissioned the Independent Review of Economic Policy to help better align policies, programmes and resources to support economic growth. The Independent Report, which I received in September 2009, contains 58 recommendations, the majority of which I have accepted. Arrangements have been put in place to oversee the implementation of these recommendations, which is progressing in line with the timescales detailed in my statement to the Assembly on the 25th January 2010.

Tourism: Volcanic Eruption

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any continuing difficulties being experienced by the tourism industry due to the recent volcanic eruption.

(AQO 1200/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The tourism sector is directly affected by the ability of tourists to get to Northern Ireland and recent cancellations equate to a direct loss for the accommodation sector, and an indirect loss of associated spend in the local area.

It is estimated that between £1.3million and £1.8million pounds of direct tourism expenditure may have been lost to the Northern Ireland economy during the initial days of the flight restrictions.

Tourism Ireland took prudent steps to postpone campaigns, particularly those with air carriers, for the duration of the closure of airspace and publicised the fact that ferry companies continued to operate normally. All campaigns have since been re-instated.

Northern Ireland airspace was temporarily closed again on the morning of Tuesday 4th May 2010. If air travel restrictions continue to be sporadic for any length of time difficulties for the tourism industry are to be expected and my Department, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Corporation Tax

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether a reduction in corporation tax would be beneficial in attracting foreign investment and what action her Department intends to take following the Economic Reform Group's report.

(AQO 1201/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There is evidence that a reduced corporation tax would be beneficial in helping to attract foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland. However, we also need to carefully consider the financial implications associated with such a reduction.

This is a strategically important issue and will be part of the deliberations of the recently established Executive Sub-Committee on the economy.

Quinn Insurance

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the administrator in relation to job losses at Quinn Insurance and to outline her Department's strategy for dealing with the impact of the planned 800 redundancies.

(AQO 1202/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment I have been closely involved with the developing situation in Quinn Insurance Limited since it was placed into Administration on the 30th March 2010. Since then, I and my officials have been in regular contact with the company administrators, senior management and employees. My officials in Invest NI have been in contact with the Administrator on a daily basis and have sought to provide support and help on what continues to be a very fluid situation. I wish to confirm that all possible steps are being taken by my Department and Invest NI officials to assist the company and the joint administrators find a resolution to the difficult issues facing the company.

Executive colleagues will already be aware of the direct representation which the NI Executive has made to the Irish Regulator and the Financial Services Authority in relation to the opening up of the UK business.

On Friday, 30th April 2010 the company administrators announced a planned redundancy programme which they have estimated will result in 900 job losses from across the Quinn Insurance business, in both the UK and Ireland. Of the total redundancies announced, job losses in County Fermanagh are likely to be over 200 – with 179 staff in the Enniskillen Contact Centre currently at risk and an additional 27 in the Quinn Insurance claims operation in Derrylin, Co. Fermanagh. Invest NI has sought further clarification from the Administrators on whether redundancies in the Cavan operation will result in additional job losses in Northern Ireland due to the cross border nature of the travel to work area for Quinn Insurance Limited. These job losses are extremely regrettable and the impact will be felt not only in the immediate local area but in the wider Border area.

Response to the situation has been rapid. Invest NI immediately requested a meeting with the HR Manager in Quinn Insurance who is tasked with implementing the redundancy package. I am pleased to confirm that this meeting took place on Tuesday 4th May 2010 and colleagues in DEL are currently taking forward the action points agreed at this meeting, which will include the scheduling of a redundancy clinic provisionally planned for the first week of June 2010.

I myself have subsequently met with employee representatives from Quinn Insurance on Wednesday 5th May 2010 in Enniskillen. I listened to their concerns in relation to the potential for further redundancies as a result of the new business model Quinn are operating under in the UK insurance market. As a result I have requested an urgent meeting with the Irish Regulator to share with him the concerns of the employees and to understand the strategy which is being implemented to put the company on a sound commercial footing.

In addition to this, I along with the Employment and Learning Minister, Sir Reg Empey have been able to announce the appointment of Leslie Ross to co-ordinate the Government's response to the situation at

Quinn Insurance. I see this as a positive response and it is hoped that his expertise will be a valuable attribute in leading the inter-agency approach to help those facing redundancy.

Quinn Insurance, and indeed the Quinn Group, remains a major player in the NI Economy in terms of both employment and the fiscal contribution and the job losses announced last Friday are deeply regrettable and obviously will have a huge impact on the local area.

I wish to emphasis that along with Invest NI officials, and colleagues in the Department of Employment and Learning, we will do all possible to limit the impact of the redundancies.

Department of the Environment

Volume of Landfill

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment what is the total volume of landfill generated in each local Council area in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 6353/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): Until December 2003, District Councils in Northern Ireland were the regulating authority for landfill facilities and in many instances were also the controlling operators of the landfill sites. NIEA therefore did not have the statutory power or responsibility to request landfill data from Councils prior to this date.

The Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme (NILAS) was introduced in April 2005 and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is the designated Monitoring Authority and maintains a landfill allowances register. District Councils are required to report on municipal waste each quarter including tonnage figures of municipal waste collected, municipal waste sent to landfill and tonnage of municipal waste sent to waste facilities.

Data returns are made using the WasteDataFlow (WDF) UK-wide online database which has been in place since 2005. Councils electronically submit their statistical waste information to NIEA.

Data submissions from the Councils for the initial implementation year 2005/06 are incomplete. Additionally, Councils have not yet returned data for the fourth quarter of 2009/10. Consequently, the Agency only holds municipal waste data for the last 3.75 years.

The attached spreadsheet provides a detailed breakdown of the tonnage of municipal waste landfilled for the 3 Waste Groups, arc21, NWRWMG and SWaMP 2008 and for each District Council area for 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 (April –Dec only). The total tonnage of municipal waste landfilled in Northern Ireland was 786,951 tonnes, 749,449 tonnes, 694,904 tonnes and 512,604 tonnes respectively.

The Agency is not required and does not hold waste data for the total volume of landfill generated in each local council. This would include an extensive range of other waste streams as listed in the European Waste Catalogue (EWC).

High Hedges Legislation

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescale for the proposed high hedges legislation; and to outline progress to date.

(AQW 6485/10)

Minister of the Environment: A consultation on a draft High Hedges Bill took place between December 2009 and March 2010. Following analysis of the consultation responses the Bill was finalised and introduced in the Assembly on 26 April 2010.

The Bill passed Second Stage on 10 May 2010 and has now proceeded to Committee Stage.

The aim is to have legislation enacted by March 2011 or earlier if possible.

Planning Service Staff

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how he plans to redeploy the technical staff who are included in the 269 Planning Service staff earmarked for redeployment.

(AQW 6513/10)

Minister of the Environment: Technical staff identified as surplus will be offered the opportunity to be regraded and redeployed to another suitable discipline. It is expected that these posts will be mainly within the administrative grades. Initial redeployment will be within DOE after which staff will be made available to fill vacancies in other NICS Departments.

Planning Service Staff

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the redeployment of 269 Planning Service staff; and (ii) what is the maximum number of redundancies that could arise as a result of redeployment.

(AQW 6514/10)

Minister of the Environment: (i) Senior officials in my Department are engaged with the Department of Finance and Personnel in developing both a Regrading Scheme to enable Professional & Technical Planners to transfer voluntarily to the General Service discipline; and a Redeployment Scheme for all staff who become surplus which will create the opportunity for redeployment to vacancies in DOE and across the NICS.

(ii) The primary aim of management will be to ensure the absorption of surplus staff by means of redeployment either to other suitable posts in DOE or in another Department. It is expected that the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) should be able to manage the workforce reductions without the need for redundancies, although particular difficulties may arise in certain specialist grades or locations. The NICS has a range of pre-redundancy measures available which will be used, as required, to help minimise or avoid the need for redundancies. Trade Union Side is being consulted as appropriate.

Planning Service Staff

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether redeployed Planning Service staff will have to reapply for their jobs if the number of planning applications rises significantly.

(AQW 6516/10)

Minister of the Environment: In developing the arrangements for the redeployment of professional planning staff to other duties in the NICS the department will seek to incorporate provisions that would enable those staff to be considered for future vacancies in planning.

Planning Applications

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications he has requested not to be processed due to the current economic climate.

(AQW 6517/10)

Minister of the Environment: None. All planning applications are currently being progressed by Planning Service in line with its statutory obligations and Business Plan objectives.

About 2,500 planning applications are currently being held as deferred and are not being progressed awaiting the Executive's agreement on draft PPS21.

In addition there are about 1,500 major applications in the planning system longer than 12 months and approximately one third of these are not being effectively progressed because outstanding information is awaited from the applicants/agents, who, I understand, are finding it difficult to provide this critically important information because of the additional financial implications during the current economic climate.

Planning Service Staff

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the criteria that will be used for the re-deployment of 270 Planning Service staff to other positions in the Civil Service.

(AQW 6523/10)

Minister of the Environment: The department is approaching the redeployment of Planning Service staff in line with the standard terms and conditions for dealing with such situations in the NICS.

Redeployment will primarily be based on the need to retain those staff necessary to ensure key services to customers can be maintained and impact from the reduction in staff is minimised. The personal preferences of staff who volunteer for redeployment will be taken into account where possible. Random selection will be used only where no other option exists.

Planning Service Staff

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what action he intends to take in relation to the staffing levels of the Planning Service; and (ii) for his assessment of how this action will affect the career paths of planners and the transfer of planning functions to local authorities next year.

(AQW 6548/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department's Planning Service is experiencing a budgetary shortfall of just over £8m this year and cost reduction measures, which include a significant reduction in staffing numbers, are being considered. However, the Northern Ireland Civil Service should be able to manage the workforce reductions in the Planning Service through the redeployment of surplus staff either to other suitable posts in the DOE or in another NICS Department.

In relation to the career paths of specialist planners, where it is necessary to regrade and redeploy specialist planning staff to a general service post outside their professional discipline they can retain their planning status provided they can demonstrate 50 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) over a 24 month period.

In this situation the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) would regard reading professional planning magazines or even working in a voluntary role with Planning Aid or attending a training course on a planning related issue as acceptable CPD.

In relation to the transfer of planning functions to local authorities, only staff in Planning Service at the time of transfer to local authorities will be in the affected group to transfer to the new employer. However, the Department will examine the scope for specialist planners to be considered for future vacancies in planning whether in central or local government.

Recommendation from a Boundary Commission

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware of any precedent whereby a Minister in any jurisdiction in the UK has sought to modify a recommendation from a Boundary Commission.

(AQW 6550/10)

Minister of the Environment: There have been a number of occasions when modifications have been made to the recommendations of Boundary Commissions. Some of these are set out below.

In the District of Ashfield (Electoral Changes) Order 2000 (SI 2000/3295), the Secretary of State made a modification to the Local Government Boundary Commission's recommendations in relation to a ward boundary.

In the Borough of Tunbridge Wells (Electoral Changes) Order 2001 (SI 2001/3559), the Secretary of State made modifications to the Local Government Boundary Commission's recommendations in relation to both parish and borough ward boundaries and to the number of parish wards.

In the Borough of Dartford (Electoral Changes) Order 2001 (SI 2001/3560), the Secretary of State made a modification to the Local Government Boundary Commission's recommendations in relation to a ward boundary.

In the District of Chiltern (Electoral Changes) Order 2002 (SI 2002/1784), the Electoral Commission made modifications to the Local Government Boundary Commission's recommendations in relation to the names of district wards and district ward boundaries.

Planning Service Posts at County Hall, Omagh

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment whether he can commit to retaining all existing Planning Service posts at County Hall, Omagh; and to detail what action his Department has taken to protect this service.

(AQW 6569/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department's Planning Service is currently experiencing a budgetary shortfall of just over £8m, mainly due to a significant reduction in planning fees income associated with a reduction in the number of planning applications being received. In light of this much reduced volume of planning applications and reduced income, the Planning Service is seeking to identify cost reduction measures which will help it to align staffing levels and costs more closely with work demands and revenue.

I anticipate that the redeployment of 271 staff from the Planning Service will be necessary to delivery the required scale of cost reductions. I cannot therefore give a guarantee that as a result of the work being undertaken by the Department to reduce the Planning Service operating costs that all existing posts at County Hall, Omagh will be retained.

I am confident however, that the Northern Ireland Civil Service should be able to manage the workforce reductions in the Planning Service through the redeployment of surplus staff either to other suitable posts in the DOE or in another NICS Department.

The Planning Service will reorganise to live within its budget and reprioritise resources to ensure the impact from the reduction in staff is minimised and key services to customers can be maintained and this includes the Omagh Division Planning Office.

I will also ensure that the Department makes the appropriate representations to DFP for additional in year funding at the June Monitoring round. You may also wish to note that the Department has initiated a fundamental review of the nature and structure of the fees charged for planning services with the aim of ensuring that the fees charges for specific chargeable services are broadly consistent with the costs of providing those services.

Knock Golf Club, Belfast

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment for his Department's assessment of the impact on the environment in the development on the landscape wedge of the planning application by Knock Golf Club, Belfast.

(AQW 6574/10)

Minister of the Environment: The impact on the environment in this area will be limited, as the proposal by Knock Golf Club is for housing on 11.3 hectares of a 36.5 hectare golf course with 22 hectares remaining as open space following the planned return of lands for hospital use. The golf club is part of the wider Dundonald Landscape Wedge which is visually linked to other open space in the area, namely the Stormont Estate lands immediately to the north of the Upper Newtownards Road plus the agricultural lands to the north of Stoney Road. The application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement which was the subject of consultation in accordance with legislation. Northern Ireland Environment Agency had no objection, subject to conditions. The assessment made by the Landscape Architects' Branch of the Planning Service was that the original application would have an adverse impact on the landscape features of the area. This view did not change after the submission of the amendments to the application despite the fact that the application was changed

significantly in order to reduce the impact on the Bluebell Wood in particular and reduce the footprint of the built area. The Landscape Architect's view was a consideration from a specific and particular concern relating primarily to the impact of the proposed housing on the trees and the landscape, but did not take account of the individual location or condition of the trees, nor of the fact that they are not protected and could be lopped, topped or felled at any time. Full account was taken of this response to the consultation and other environmental information in the normal way when the application was being assessed. However, the judgement arrived at was that the housing layout could be developed in such a way as to protect many of the remaining trees because of the fact that they are laid out in lines along the current fairways. The Department remains of the view that the scale, nature and location of the development as proposed on the golf club lands is acceptable and has no adverse impact on the environment.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Team

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment why a planning application for a fuel filling station in the Dundonald landscape wedge was refused following the advice of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team, while a similar application by the Hanwood Trust was approved without being referred to the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team for consideration.

(AQW 6575/10)

Minister of the Environment: The application referred to identified as reference Y/2008/0404/F was not refused by Planning Service but is the subject of a non-determination appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission which will make the decision in respect of the application.

In contrast, application Y/2009/0440/F was an amendment to a previous permission (Y/2006/0481/F) and development was commenced so the principle of development was firmly established and issues of prematurity and prejudice did not arise so the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan team was not consulted.

Belfast Strategic Planning Section

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how major planning applications, currently processed by the Belfast Strategic Planning Section, will be dealt with under the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 6586/10)

Minister of the Environment: Post RPA, as part of this new development management approach for processing planning applications, a three-tier hierarchy of development will be created consisting of regionally significant, major and local development, to ensure that application procedures are proportionate and responsive to these three different types of development category, with appropriate resources and decision-making mechanisms, tailored according to the scale and complexity of the proposed development.

Under this new development management hierarchy regionally significant applications will be determined by the Department with the decision taken by the Minister. These will be small in number, estimated at approximately 50-80 applications annually. Decisions on planning applications for categories of major and local development, which will form the majority of applications, will be taken by the new district councils.

Regionally significant developments will form the top tier of development proposals and will be made up of those applications which have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region.

They will raise strategic considerations, with impacts or benefits that extend well beyond the area of an individual district council to the extent that they become of regional significance. It is proposed to revise the current Article 31 powers to take account of the RPA, and provide a basis for the legislative framework for considering these regionally significant applications.

In some exceptional circumstances a major application may give rise to issues of regional significance sufficient to warrant it being called – in from a district council for determination by the Department and decision by the Minister. The number of major applications where this action might be appropriate will be small and limited to where there is a significant and unresolved objection from a statutory consultee; a significant departure from the area plan; or where a district council has a significant financial or ownership interest.

Planning Responsibilities for Local Councils

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to introducing planning responsibilities for local councils in advance of the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 6588/10)

Minister of the Environment: It is important that I take the time necessary to ensure implementation of the Executive's decisions on the future of local government and that this is done in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Consequently, I am in discussion with the representatives of Executive parties to find a common way forward on the reform programme, part of which is to consider how and when Land Use Planning will transfer to local government.

Public Accounts Committee's Report on the Planning Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his response to the Public Accounts Committee's report of February 2010 on the Planning Service; and if this response will be published.
(AQW 6610/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am committed to reforming and improving the planning system and welcome the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which will help with this process. The PAC report contains 15 recommendations, 13 of which required responses from the Department/Planning Service. The remaining 2 recommendations applied more generally to the NICS and the responses for these were prepared by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

My Department has responded positively to the recommendations through the Memorandum of Reply (MOR) which was laid in the Assembly by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on 16 April 2010. The Memorandum of Reply can be accessed via;

<http://www.aasdni.gov.uk/pubs/MORs/8th%20&%209th%20Report%2009%20-10.pdf>

Work is now underway towards implementing all of the recommendations and my officials will monitor progress on a quarterly basis through the Planning Service and Departmental Audit Committees. The Department's internal auditors will also provide an independent assessment on the progress of recommendations through their work programme.

I have recognised for some time issues identified in the PAC report and many of which will be addressed through the preparation of necessary legislation for my planning reform agenda, on which I have obtained agreement from the Executive.

Lough Neagh Advisory Committee and the Lower Bann Advisory Committee

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to ensure the future of the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee and the Lower Bann Advisory Committee in light of the two councils' decisions to withdraw funding.
(AQW 6629/10)

Minister of the Environment: The decision by a number of Councils to withdraw funding has meant that the two Advisory Committees are no longer sustainable without this full support. I made it clear to the Councils that my Department would be unable to make up any shortfall. I regret that their decisions have left my Department with little alternative other than to wind up the two Advisory Committees on 30 June 2010, when the three month extension period comes to an end.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment (i) when the terms of reference for the public inquiry into the planning application to extend the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport will be published; (ii) whether there will be an opportunity to comment on the terms of reference before they are published; and (iii) when the public inquiry will be held.

(AQW 6633/10)

Minister of the Environment: There are no terms of reference for a public local inquiry. In line with Article 31 (2) of the 1991 Order the Department may cause a public local inquiry to be held for the purpose of considering representations made in respect of an application.

A date for the public inquiry has not yet been set.

Road Safety Strategy

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his plans for co-ordinating implementation of the new Road Safety strategy.

(AQO 1204/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Road Safety Review Group, comprising senior representatives from DOE, DRD, DHSSPS and PSNI is responsible for coordinating delivery of the current Road Safety Strategy. It has provided an integrated approach to the planning, co-ordination and delivery of government's road safety activities.

This partnership arrangement, with each participant representing a particular area of expertise, has worked well and has made a significant contribution to casualty reduction since the launch of the current strategy in 2002.

While the precise nature of the structures which will implement the new strategy has yet to be decided, I would intend building on the success of the partnership approach.

However, there is an opportunity to involve a wider range of stakeholders. The ongoing consultation on a new strategy looks at extending the existing structures to work with others who can provide support in improving road safety.

The paper looks at the development of a new independent expert group and at how we might better conduct local road safety pilot initiatives working with voluntary, community and other stakeholders.

The paper seeks views on working more closely with local authorities, to explore ways of reducing casualties at a local level and addressing local needs and priorities.

As you can see there are quite a few proposals about how best to implement the new strategy. I await with interest the outcome of the consultation and the public's views on delivering improvements in road safety over the next ten years.

Air Quality

Lord Browne asked the Minister of the Environment what is the expected completion date for the consultation on the draft Local Air Quality Management policy and when he expects to have the policy in place.

(AQO 1213/10)

Minister of the Environment: The consultation on the draft Local Air Quality Management policy guidance finished on 26 March 2010. The Department is currently considering responses from consultees and will amend the policy where appropriate. The Department aims to publish the finalised guidance in June 2010.

Local Government Boundaries

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what advice he sought before making modifications to the recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner.
(AQO 1215/10)

Minister of the Environment: My officials provided me with advice on the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's Report. I also sought and received legal advice in relation to a number of issues, from the Departmental Solicitor's Office.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many areas of special scientific interest were designated in 2009.
(AQO 1216/10)

Minister of the Environment: Twenty-five Areas of Special Scientific Interest were declared in the 2009/10 financial year.

Planning Service Staff

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the potential negative impact on the economy of the proposed redeployment of up to 270 Planning Service staff.
(AQO 1217/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department is experiencing a financial shortfall of c£16m for 2010-11. The total Planning Service shortfall is estimated at £8.3m the bulk of which (£6.4m) relates to a reduction in planning receipts.

The global economic downturn and its impact on the property and housing markets has clearly been a major factor contributing to the sharp fall in planning application numbers and also related fee receipts received by Planning Service. In light of the much reduced volume of planning applications and related fee receipts Planning Service has been considering ways to reduce its operating costs to align staffing levels and costs more closely to work demands and revenue. Significant staff reductions and redeployment of staff is necessary to align staffing levels and costs more closely to work demands and revenue. The Planning Service will reorganise to live within its budget and reprioritise resources to ensure key services to customers can be maintained and impact on the economy from the reduction in staff is minimised.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Review of the Civil Service E02 Grade

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he is aware of any reasons for a delay in the review of the Civil Service E02 grade as agreed as part of the Equal Pay settlement of February 2010; or if the review will be instigated immediately.
(AQW 6495/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Preparatory work on the comprehensive pay and grading review agreed as part of the NICS equal pay settlement has already commenced. The review has not been delayed and I am determined that it will progress without any undue delay.

Electricity Costs

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the savings that would be made by all Departments reducing their electricity costs by 25%.
(AQW 6508/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Based on the most recently published Public Sector Energy Campaign (PSEC) figures for 2007/08, it is estimated that reducing the electricity costs of the 11 Departments' core estates by 25% would amount to an annual saving of approximately £1,424,000

Barnett Formula

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the Barnett Formula operates in translating the effect of changes in spending in England to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 6527/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Under the Barnett Formula, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland receive a population-based proportion of changes in planned spending on comparable UK Government services in England. The Formula is applied separately to capital and current expenditure. Northern Ireland has full comparability in areas such as health and education but no comparability on defence spending.

The Executive has full discretion in terms of allocating the Block Grant from the UK Government.

Purchasing of Freehold Property

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans she has to enable homeowners to purchase the freehold to their property, as is the case in England and Wales.

(AQW 6542/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Northern Ireland already has two statutory schemes which allow for the enlargement of leasehold estates. One is set out in the Leasehold (Enlargement and Extension) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 and the other is set out in the Ground Rents Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

The Northern Ireland Law Commission is currently considering the issue of land law reform and will be examining both Acts as part of that project. It remains to be seen whether any legislative amendments will be recommended. However, the Commission's examination will take account of the Northern Ireland context and any recommendations will, therefore, be suitably framed for this jurisdiction.

Arabs Resident in Northern Ireland

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Arabs are currently resident in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 6547/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A total of 285 people (0.02% of all people usually resident in Northern Ireland) indicated through the 2001 Census that their ethnic group was Arab.

Planning Service

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why his Department did not make up the shortfall in funding previously provided from planning fees which has led to 269 jobs in the Planning Service being put in jeopardy.

(AQW 6555/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not within the remit of the Department of Finance and Personnel to transfer funding to assist other Departments to manage their Departmental pressures. Such decisions are a matter for the Executive.

The Executive has previously allocated an additional £2m to Planning Service in light of the reduction in Planning Fee income. In recognition of the financial pressure faced by Planning Service, my Department also agreed that Planning Service should increase planning application fees by 15%.

The Department of the Environment will have the opportunity to submit a request for additional resources in 2010-11 as part of the forthcoming June Monitoring Round which will be considered

by the Executive in the context of the overall amount of resources available and the other spending pressures facing departments.

EU Funding

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the structures in place within their Department to manage EU funding.

(AQO 1185/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: DFP has Member State responsibility for the four EU Structural Funds Programmes currently operating in Northern Ireland—Competitiveness, Employment, PEACE III and INTERREG IVA.

Each of the four programmes has a Managing Authority as detailed in the table below. The Managing Authorities are responsible for directly implementing and managing the Operational Programmes.

Programme	Managing Authority
European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)
European Social Fund Employment 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)

DFP chairs an inter-departmental EU Steering Group with membership drawn from the Managing Authorities and relevant Accountable Departments.

DFP chairs the Programme Monitoring Committee for the Competitiveness and Employment Programmes, and attends the Monitoring Committees for the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes in its Member State capacity.

DFP is the Accountable Department for the Public Sector Collaboration Theme under INTERREG IVA and for the Technical Assistance budgets under INTERREG IVA and PEACE III.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist for the Royal Hospital

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will be appointing a replacement consultant paediatric gastroenterologist to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children for the current consultant, who is leaving on 23 April 2010; and (ii) what steps his Department has taken to appoint a replacement, including steps to advertise the post and a timetable for appointment.

(AQW 6449/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): Responsibility for workforce succession planning rests with the Belfast Trust; it is not a Departmental matter.

It is anticipated that a replacement will be in place by September.

To ensure appropriate services are available in the interim period, a locum consultant in general paediatrics, supported by two general paediatric consultants, is currently being engaged to take responsibility for the existing clinics attended by paediatric gastroenterology patients. Commissioners will continue to examine this service on a regional basis and consider how the service may be further strengthened for the future.

Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist for the Royal Hospital

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail when the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust first learned that there would be a vacancy for consultant paediatric gastroenterologist at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children from 23 April 2010.

(AQW 6450/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Responsibility for workforce succession planning rests with the Belfast Trust; it is not a Departmental matter.

It is anticipated that a replacement will be in place by September.

To ensure appropriate services are available in the interim period, a locum consultant in general paediatrics, supported by two general paediatric consultants, is currently being engaged to take responsibility for the existing clinics attended by paediatric gastroenterology patients. Commissioners will continue to examine this service on a regional basis and consider how the service may be further strengthened for the future.

Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist for the Royal Hospital

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail what interim measures have been put in place, by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, to provide care for patients requiring the services of a consultant paediatric gastroenterologist at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children from 23 April 2010, particularly in relation to (a) clinics; and (b) emergency care; and (ii) what assessment has been made of risks and benefits of the alternative options.

(AQW 6451/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Responsibility for workforce succession planning rests with the Belfast Trust; it is not a Departmental matter.

It is anticipated that a replacement will be in place by September.

To ensure appropriate services are available in the interim period, a locum consultant in general paediatrics, supported by two general paediatric consultants, is currently being engaged to take responsibility for the existing clinics attended by paediatric gastroenterology patients. Commissioners will continue to examine this service on a regional basis and consider how the service may be further strengthened for the future.

Health Service Dentist Posts

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the creation of additional Health Service dentist posts.

(AQW 6479/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As you are aware I announced in May 2009 that the Department had awarded a tender to Oasis Dental Care Ltd for additional dental services which will result in 38 additional dentists being available in various areas of Northern Ireland. I can confirm that excellent progress has been made. The first practices opened in November 2009 and the latest practices to open are Holywood on 27 April and Bangor on 5 May. It is planned that the remaining 4 practices will become operational during the month of June although this is subject to planning approval.

Breaches of the Anti-smoking Legislation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been prosecuted by local councils for breaches of the anti-smoking legislation.

(AQW 6480/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were 95 individual prosecutions under the smoke-free legislation from 30 April 2007 until 31 March 2010. These prosecutions included the offences of smoking in a smoke-free place or vehicle, failing to prevent smoking in a smoke-free place or vehicle and failing to display appropriate “no smoking” signage.

In addition, there were 60 prosecutions of retailers for breaking the law with regards to underage sales of tobacco products between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2010.

IVF Treatment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have applied for Health Service IVF treatment in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6491/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

Year	07/08	08/09	09/10
Number added to waiting list (IVF, ICSI, FET, SIUI)	888	716	789

IVF Treatment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people who received IVF treatment from the Health Service were successful in (i) conceiving a child; and (ii) delivering a child, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6493/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Fertility Centre does not record this information separately for publicly and privately funded patients therefore the following table details the results of treatment for both.

	Pregnancies	Live births
2009/10 (pregnancies only)	114	N/A
2008/09	218	197
2007/08	201	198

Bimaxillary Osteotomy Procedure

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) where in Northern Ireland the bimaxillary osteotomy procedure (maxillo-facial surgery) is offered; and (ii) whether any patients have been referred to Great Britain for this procedure in the last two years.

(AQW 6511/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The bimaxillary osteotomy procedure (maxillofacial surgery) is provided at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, and Altnagelvin Hospital, Londonderry.

No patients have been referred from Northern Ireland to Great Britain for this procedure in the last two years.

Bonuses Paid to Doctors

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5852/10, (i) how many doctors received a bonus award following the 2008/09 awards round; (ii) what is the average salary of doctors who received a bonus award; and (iii) what is the average salary of the 657 consultants who received a bonus award.

(AQW 6518/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Doctors do not receive bonus payments.

The salary range of the consultants who received a Clinical Excellence Award was £74,028 - £98,962.

Desertcreat College in Cookstown

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when his Department will release the £30 million funding for the fire and rescue services section in the new Desertcreat College in Cookstown.

(AQW 6519/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The position remains the same as that indicated in my joint responses to AQW 6122/10 and AQW 6126/10, answered on 28 April 2010.

Gorse Fires

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many gorse fires have been recorded; and (ii) how much land has been damaged by these fires, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6529/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of gorse fires in each of the last three years is shown in the table.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Number of gorse fires	2253	3862	3285

Information relating to the areas of land damaged by gorse related incidents is not available.

Charities

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the charities funded by his Department.

(AQW 6539/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on organisations in receipt of government funding can be accessed through the Government Funding Database website at <http://govfundingdbni.nics.gov.uk/gfdpublic/>

Chief Executive Bonuses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the Chief Executive of each Health and Social Care Trust received in bonuses in (i) the 2009/10 financial year; and (ii) the 2010/11 financial year to date.

(AQW 6541/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In light of the current economic climate my Department has instructed Health and Social Care employers that no bonuses should be paid to their Chief Executives in the 2009/10 financial year. The 2010/11 pay award for Health and Social Care Chief Executives has not yet been agreed.

Single Bill on Mental Health

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the development of a single bill on mental health.

(AQW 6551/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 10 September 2009 I announced that my Department would take the lead in preparing a single Bill encompassing mental capacity and mental

health provisions and that this would be introduced into the next Assembly in 2011. In the interim policy development work in this complex area has been proceeding and has involved major engagement with stakeholders. The next step will be consultation on an Equality Impact Assessment prior to seeking Executive endorsement of the policy.

Bamford Action Plan

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he has taken to deliver the Bamford Action Plan; and in what aspects progress has fallen behind schedule.

(AQW 6553/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Bamford Action Plan 2009-2011, which is available on the DHSSPS website, summarises actions already taken to improve mental health and learning disability services and sets out a wide range of actions committed to over the period 2009-2011 across Government. Each Department is responsible for delivery of its own actions. A Task Force has been established to drive forward the actions which fall to the health and social care sector.

The inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability group last met in November 2009, when substantial progress towards delivery of the Action Plan across Government was noted. Work is under way to convene the next meeting of the Ministerial Group to assess progress at this stage.

Staff Posts at County Hall, Ballymena

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following his letter to staff dated 4 February 2009, in which he stated that 'over 80% of staff will remain in their current location and over one third of the tier 3 posts will not be in headquarters' (i) whether he can confirm that this is still the case; and (ii) how many and what proportion of staff and posts at County Hall, Ballymena will remain local.

(AQW 6556/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new HSC organisations have all commenced early work to examine in particular, the realignment and location of legacy HSS Board functions. This work is still under consideration and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on the numbers of posts at any location until such times as this process is complete. I remain committed however to ensuring, that a strong local presence continues to be a feature of our health and social care system.

Staff Posts at County Hall, Ballymena

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the net change in the number of higher banded posts, above Band 4, created at County Hall, Ballymena under the Review of Public Administration changes.

(AQW 6557/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new HSC organisations have all commenced early work to examine in particular, the realignment and location of legacy HSS Board functions. This work is still under consideration and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on the numbers of posts at any location until such times as this process is complete. I remain committed however to ensuring, that a strong local presence continues to be a feature of our health and social care system.

Staff Posts at County Hall, Ballymena

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many health staff posts have been removed from County Hall, Ballymena since 01 April 2009, broken down by post and band.

(AQW 6559/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new HSC organisations have all commenced early work to examine in particular, the realignment and location of legacy HSS Board functions. This work is still under consideration and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on the numbers of posts at any location until such times as this process is complete. I remain committed however to ensuring, that a strong local presence continues to be a feature of our health and social care system.

IVF Treatment

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of errors made during IVF treatment in each of the last 10 years; and to outline the nature of each error.
(AQW 6566/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The term “error” is not recognised within the information systems at the Regional Fertility Centre (RFC).

I can confirm however that the Department has not been subject to any legal proceedings in relation to these services.

IVF Treatment

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of legal proceedings taken against his Department as a result of errors made during IVF treatment in each of the last 10 years; and the outcome of each case.
(AQW 6567/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The term “error” is not recognised within the information systems at the Regional Fertility Centre (RFC).

I can confirm however that the Department has not been subject to any legal proceedings in relation to these services.

Knock Golf Club, Belfast

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the land leased to Knock Golf Club, Belfast belongs to the South Eastern Health and Social Care trust or the Health Estates Agency.
(AQW 6572/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is approximately 12 acres of land leased to Knock Golf Club. Around 10 acres is owned by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and just under 2 acres is owned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Decisions relating to the land leased to Knock Golf Club will depend on the associated issue. Some decisions will be made by the tenant, Knock Golf Club and others by the landlord being either the South Eastern HSC Trust or the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Knock Golf Club, Belfast

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether decisions relating to the land leased to Knock Golf Club, Belfast is primarily a matter for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust or the Health Estates Agency.
(AQW 6573/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is approximately 12 acres of land leased to Knock Golf Club. Around 10 acres is owned by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and just under 2 acres is owned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Decisions relating to the land leased to Knock Golf Club will depend on the associated issue. Some decisions will be made by the tenant, Knock Golf Club and others by the landlord being either the South Eastern HSC Trust or the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Funding Cuts

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if groups who support families and people affected by suicide or mental health problems will not be subject to any funding cuts by his Department in the next three years.

(AQW 6619/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the context of the constraints that have been placed upon my budget in 2010/11, including the cuts to my budget as voted by the Assembly, I can not guarantee that services relating to suicide prevention or mental health will not be impacted. Whilst I will do all I can to minimise the impact, providing assurances to one area of the health service would unfairly burden other equally needy areas with the majority of cuts.

Applied Behaviour Analysis in Treating Autism

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the effectiveness of Applied Behaviour Analysis in treating Autism spectrum disorders; and if he has any plans to provide funding for this treatment, which is available in the Republic of Ireland, given that treatment can cost families up to £25,000 per year.

(AQW 6663/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Services for children with special education needs are the responsibility of the Department of Education and it is my understanding that the provision of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) in the Republic of Ireland is made through the education system.

In relation to health and social care, whilst a range of interventions and treatments exist to help those affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders, the Independent review of Autism Services did not feel it was appropriate to recommend any single manner of intervention. It is for professionals to assess the health and social care needs of individuals and to put in place an appropriate care plan.

Department of Justice

Detention Conditions in Prisons

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice what action he intends to take to improve the detention conditions in prisons.

(AQW 6245/10)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): As I advised the Justice Committee on 22 April, parts of the current prison estate are unfit for purpose. I will be bringing forward proposals to improve physical conditions to enable enhanced engagement between prison service staff and prisoners to reduce re-offending, and to reduce costs.

In addition, in line with the Hillsborough Agreement of 5 February, I have announced a rolling review, beginning with a review of the regime in Maghaberry. I will advise Members of further details shortly.

Restorative Justice

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice to outline the role of restorative justice schemes within the Criminal Justice system; and what action he intends to take to support them.

(AQW 6246/10)

Minister of Justice: Restorative Justice plays an important role within the criminal justice system by bringing victims and offenders together to acknowledge the impact of the harm caused by an offence and agree a plan of how it may be redressed. For example, Youth Conference Service restorative plans account for around 48 % of all Youth Court disposals, and the Probation Board and its community partners have so far facilitated over 100 adult restorative interventions.

In addition there are 15 community-based restorative justice schemes accredited under a Government Protocol. They facilitate restorative interventions for offences deemed suitable for referral by the Public Prosecution Service as an alternative to prosecution. Schemes have been allocated £100,000 from criminal justice agencies, match funded by a charitable foundation, in each of the last three years to support their restorative practices. I intend to review arrangements shortly to examine how best schemes' restorative skills can contribute to the continuing success of restorative practices in the criminal justice system.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans to tackle antisocial behaviour.
(AQW 6261/10)

Minister of Justice: My Department has plans in place to tackle antisocial behaviour and to deliver a 15% reduction in incidents by 2011.

Working closely with partner organisations at a regional and local level, the plans are based on three themes. Prevention includes community safety wardens, neighbourhood watch, the clean neighbourhood programme and CCTV; Intervention includes diversionary programmes such as 'Splash'; Enforcement provides for a graduated approach from warning letters to Acceptable Behaviour Contracts through to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

We are currently on target to achieve the 15% reduction and tackling antisocial behaviour is one of my priority areas.

Tackling antisocial behaviour will remain a priority in any of my Department's future plans on Community Safety. My Department will continue to promote and support the development of Neighbourhood Watch schemes and plans are well advanced to deliver a NI-wide Diversionary Programme (Splash) over the Summer of 2010.

Bomb Planted at Palace Barracks

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total costs incurred by his Department as a result of the bomb planted at Palace Barracks on Monday 12 April.
(AQW 6262/10)

Minister of Justice: As I am sure you will appreciate, it is much too early to provide details of total costs incurred by my Department. I can, however, advise that loss adjusters have been appointed by the Compensation Agency to deal with any claims relating to the attack on 12 April.

Witnesses

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Justice what procedures are in place to ensure that witnesses, including crown witnesses, are not subjected to aggression in courts by defence lawyers.
(AQW 6300/10)

Minister of Justice: During the course of a trial judges have the responsibility for ensuring that all those involved in the proceedings, including witnesses, are treated fairly and this is an area that is covered specifically in judicial training.

In certain circumstances a court may also order that a witness be permitted to give their evidence remotely through a live television link or by way of video conferencing.

Legislation

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice what new legislation he intends to introduce before May 2011.

(AQW 6324/10)

Minister of Justice: Subject to Executive approval, I will introduce a Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill in the Autumn of this year. I look forward to discussing proposals for its content with the Justice Committee in the near future.

Retailers Selling Alcohol to Underage Customers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions were achieved against retailers for selling alcohol to underage customers, in each of the last five years; and what was the sum total of any fines imposed in each year.

(AQW 6346/10)

Minister of Justice: The table below documents the number of convictions, the number given a fine and the total sum of the fine amounts for selling intoxicating liquor to a minor. Court conviction datasets do not contain background information in relation to offences committed and it is therefore not possible to determine the number of those convicted who were retailers.

Data cover the calendar years 2002 to 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available) and are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS, THE NUMBER GIVEN A FINE AND THE TOTAL SUM OF FINE AMOUNTS (£) FOR SELLING INTOXICATING LIQUOR TO A MINOR 2002-2006

Year	Number convicted	Number given a fine	Total sum of fine amounts (£)
2002	2	2	500
2003	3	3	1325
2004	2	2	650
2005	3	3	700
2006	3	3	1400

PSNI are currently piloting in a number of Police Districts, new and additional powers to undertake “test purchases” in any alcohol retailers’ premises. Once evaluated these additional powers will be available to all Districts across Northern Ireland and will have a significant impact on building an understanding amongst retailers of the seriousness of under-age sales and hence on addressing the level of sales to those underage.

Community Policing

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice to outline any plans his Department has to increase community policing.

(AQW 6394/10)

Minister of Justice: The delivery of community policing is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Solicitors Fees

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to ensure that solicitors fees are monitored, controlled and fair.

(AQW 6401/10)

Minister of Justice: There are mechanisms already in place in the County Court and the High Court to regulate levels of remuneration for solicitors (and barristers) in civil cases. I am currently reviewing the remuneration payable under criminal legal aid and I will bring forward proposals to the Assembly in due course.

Causeway Computer System

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many criminal cases have had to be dismissed due to problems encountered with the new Causeway computer system since its inception, broken down by court division.

(AQW 6415/10)

Minister of Justice: No criminal cases have had to be dismissed due to problems encountered with the new Causeway computer system. Manual contingency arrangements are in place to allow cases to proceed if an electronic record is not available.

Youth Justice Agency

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice how many cases the Youth Justice Agency has dealt with in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6416/10)

Minister of Justice: The information requested is as follows, broken down by caseload of each of the three operational directorates of the Youth Justice Agency.

Year	Youth Conference Service ⁽¹⁾	Community Services ⁽²⁾	Juvenile Justice Centre ⁽³⁾	Total cases ⁽⁴⁾
2005/06	299	726	307	1,332
2006/07	1,298	905	333	2,536
2007/08	1,932	1,000	346	2,897
2008/09	1,620	1,006	271	2,897
2009/10	1,849	1,010	350	3,209

- (1) Includes referrals to the Youth Conference Service from the Public Prosecution Service and Court, as well as 239 referrals in 2009/10 to the Priority Youth Offending Project, a joint initiative with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Youth Justice Agency, to pilot the delivery of enhanced intervention and accountability for high risk young offenders.
- (2) Number of cases referred to Community Services for supervision in the community i.e. those subject to a community responsibility order, attendance centre order, reparation order, supervision of youth conference plans; and those referred from other sources such as Police Service of Northern Ireland, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, social services and other sources such as other criminal justice agencies and social services.
- (3) Includes initial admissions to the Juvenile Justice Centre on PACE, those on remand and sentence.
- (4) Whilst a total case figure is provided for each financial year, it should be noted that directorates of the Agency often co-work to provide different services to the same young people. For example, in 2009/10, 72% of Community Services' new referrals were from the Youth Conference Service; however each directorate performs a different aspect of service delivery of a youth conference order. In addition, more

than one referral within one directorate may also relate to the same young person, for example a young person may be referred on different occasions for different offences.

Juvenile Prison Population

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) male; (ii) female; and (iii) juvenile prison population for each of the last five years.

(AQW 6418/10)

Minister of Justice: The male, female and juvenile prison population for each of the last 5 years is as shown in the table below.

Calendar Year	(i) Adult Males (Average Yearly Population)	(ii) Females (Average Yearly Population)	(iii) Juveniles (Average Yearly Population)
2005	1235	30	32*
2006	1358	38	23*
2007	1403	43	15
2008	1443	47	17
2009	1402	49	16

* These figures include 1 female juvenile

Prison Spaces

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice to detail the maximum numbers of prison spaces currently available for (i) male; (ii) female; and (iii) juvenile offenders.

(AQW 6419/10)

Minister of Justice: The maximum numbers of prison spaces currently available are:

- (i) 1,440 for adult males (872 at Maghaberry and 568 at Magilligan prisons);
- (ii) 74 for females (at Ash House, Hydebank Wood Prison);
- (iii) 36 for male juveniles and 215 for young males (at Hydebank Wood, Young Offenders Centre).

Female juveniles and some male juveniles are detained at the Juvenile Justice Centre.

A juvenile is defined as any person under the age of 18. A young offender is defined as any person aged 18 - 21.

Sex Offenders Register

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many people are currently on the Sex Offenders Register; (ii) how many of these people are juveniles; and (iii) how many are on the register for life, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 6420/10)

Minister of Justice: The recording of information provided by offenders subject to the notification requirements set out in Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (the sex offender register) is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond to you directly.

Breaches of Licensing Laws

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many licensees have been charged by the police for alleged breaches of licensing laws; and how many have had their cases marked as 'no proceedings', in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6422/10)

Minister of Justice: Liquor licensing is a matter for the Department for Social Development, and the Department of Justice does not hold this information. The charging of licensees is a matter for the Chief Constable who is operationally independent of Ministers and accountable to the Policing Board; decisions as to prosecution are a matter for the Public Prosecution Service.

Community Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail the average waiting time for offenders to be placed on community service once convicted by the courts.

(AQW 6425/10)

Minister of Justice: The Probation Board for Northern Ireland supervises offenders sentenced to complete community service in the form of either a Community Service Order or a Combination Order.

During the financial year 2009/2010, the average time between sentence and commencement of these orders was 7 working days.

Community Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many offenders are currently waiting to be placed on community service.

(AQW 6426/10)

Minister of Justice: The Probation Board for Northern Ireland supervises offenders sentenced to complete community service in the form of either a Community Service Order or a Combination Order.

As at 26 April 2010, PBNI was supervising 804 Community Service Orders and 271 Combination Orders. Of these, 22 (2%) are currently waiting to be placed on community service.

Offences of 'Wasting Police Time'

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many offences of 'wasting police time' were recorded in each of the last 5 years; (ii) the number of prosecutions brought against these individuals; (iii) the number of prosecutions which resulted in a conviction; (iv) the sum total of any fines which were imposed; and (v) for a summary of any other sanctions which were imposed.

(AQW 6427/10)

Minister of Justice: Table 1 gives the number recorded for the offence 'wasteful employment of police time' for the calendar years 2005 to 2009. Table 2 gives the number prosecuted and number convicted. All offenders convicted for the offence were given a community-based disposal.

Data in Table 2 cover the calendar years 2002 to 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available) and are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

It is not possible to reconcile PSNI data on the number of offences recorded directly with prosecution and conviction data, as the former are offence-based whereas prosecution and conviction data are offender-based. In addition, PSNI denote the offence as it has been initially recorded and this may differ from the offence for which a suspect (or suspects) is subsequently proceeded against.

TABLE 1: RECORDED OFFENCES OF WASTEFUL EMPLOYMENT OF POLICE TIME BY YEAR REPORTED 2005-2009¹

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number recorded	4	5	4	7	13

Source: PSNI

1. Figures for 2009 are provisional and may be subject to change.

TABLE 2: NUMBER PROSECUTED AND CONVICTED FOR WASTEFUL EMPLOYMENT OF POLICE TIME 2002-2006

Year	Number prosecuted	Number convicted	Disposal given to those convicted
2002	0	0	-
2003	1	1	Supervision in the community
2004	0	0	-
2005	2	2	Supervision in the community
2006	1	1	Supervision in the community

Source: Department of Justice

Irish Language

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to promote Irish language rights within the courts system.

(AQW 6446/10)

Minister of Justice: As I stated in the Assembly on 26 April 2010 language is a cross-cutting issue, on which policy needs to be agreed by the Executive. I will consider my Department's language policy, including in respect of the Irish language in courts, as part of my contribution to the Executive strategy.

In the meantime, the Courts and Tribunals Service has adopted a Code of Courtesy on the use of Irish in official business, in line with its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Irish Language

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has any plans to promote the Irish language within the PSNI.

(AQW 6447/10)

Minister of Justice: Any plan to promote the Irish language within the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Dissident Republican Threat

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Justice if he has had any discussions with ex-Royal Ulster Constabulary specialists regarding safety precautions in handling the dissident republican threat.
(AQW 6460/10)

Minister of Justice: I have had no such discussions regarding safety precautions in respect of the dissident republican threat to the community or to police officers. However, I receive regular security briefings from the Chief Constable on the police response to the dissident republican threat.

Dissident Republican Activity

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Justice what steps he is taking to ensure that there is an adequate security force presence on the ground to deal with the increasing dissident republican activity.
(AQW 6461/10)

Minister of Justice: The allocation of policing resources is a matter for the Chief Constable who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Newtownhamilton Police Station

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice if he intends to revert Newtownhamilton police station to full-time status, given the recent terrorist attacks in the area; and if so, whether additional security measures will be put in place to protect police officers and staff.
(AQW 6472/10)

Minister of Justice: The operation of police stations is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

PSNI Stations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many PSNI stations are currently operating on a part-time basis; and how many of these are in border areas.
(AQW 6473/10)

Minister of Justice: The operation of police stations is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Review of McClurg v the Chief Constable

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the review of McClurg v the Chief Constable on 22 April 2010, for his assessment of the direction given by the Chief Constable that any claim should be resolved by the Assembly and not the serving Chief Constable.
(AQW 6494/10)

Minister of Justice: There is no doubt that a significant number of police officers through the years have been subjected to situations which have caused terrible injuries and distress, and that our community owes them a huge debt of gratitude. I believe those who have suffered deserve our support and I am pleased that measures are in place (eg through the Northern Ireland Police Fund, and PSNI Occupational Health services) to help meet the needs of these serving and former officers.

With regard to the matters brought before the courts, at considerable cost to the PSNI and Police Federation members, Chief Constables were found not to have been negligent.

I understand that the Chief Constable has suggested that plaintiffs might consider seeking an ex gratia compensation payment from the Executive and Assembly rather than continuing to pursue their claims through the courts. This would be a matter for individual plaintiffs.

Violent Assault Against Pregnant Women

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for violent assault against pregnant women have been secured in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 6499/10)

Minister of Justice: I regret that the information sought on convictions for violent assault against pregnant women is not available. Court conviction data do not contain background or victim information in relation to offences committed, and it is therefore not possible to separate out the number of such convictions from other types of assault.

Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice how many payments were made under the Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme to women whose unborn child sustained a criminal injury in each of the last 10 years.

(AQW 6500/10)

Minister of Justice: From 1 May 2002, the Compensation Agency's records show that there has been one criminal injury claim for injury to an unborn child. The 'injury' involved was the miscarriage of a 3 month old foetus following an assault on the mother. Prior to May 2002, the Agency did not record a specific injury descriptor for this type of injury.

Police and Criminal Evidence Regime

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Justice whether, on the basis of parity with England and Wales, he will retain the Police and Criminal Evidence regime.

(AQW 6502/10)

Minister of Justice: The Police & Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE), currently provides the framework of police powers in Northern Ireland which largely mirrors the equivalent PACE provision in England and Wales.

Policy responsibility for PACE legislation and associated Codes of Practice in Northern Ireland now rests with the Department of Justice. I shall keep PACE under regular review to ensure that it provides police with the powers they need to detect and investigate crime while protecting the rights of the individual. It will be for the Assembly, key stakeholders and members of the public to shape the future statutory framework.

Courts Service Translators

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent by the Courts Service on translators in each court division in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6504/10)

Minister of Justice: Prior to 2008/9 court interpreter services in the criminal courts were delivered through the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPSNI). Funding for 2008/9 and 2009/10 was the shared responsibility of the Public Prosecution Service, the then Northern Ireland Court Service and the NIO.

In Table 1 below, the figures for 2007/8 and 2008/9 have been provided by the Public Prosecution Service and it is not possible to disaggregate them by court division. The figures for 2009/10 are provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS) and the PPSNI.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 set out the costs associated with interpreting services in non-criminal proceedings which are funded through the NICTS. Information is not available by court division prior to 2008.

Information on other costs associated with translation and interpretation is only available from 2008 and includes:-

- Language Line (a telephone translation service) with expenditure of £87 and £103 in 2008/9 and 2009/10 respectively; and
- Document Translation with expenditure of £11,011 and £18,667 in 2008/9 and 2009/10 respectively.

TABLE 1: INTERPRETER COSTS IN CRIMINAL COURTS

Financial Year	Spend £	County Court Division						
		Belfast	Antrim	Ards	Armagh & South Down	Craigavon	Fermanagh & Tyrone	Londonderry
2007/8	283,282	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2008/9	433,575	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2009/10	480,000¹	105,029	81,616	32,071	81,193	42,537	113,844	23,707
	61,769²							
Total	541,769							

Notes:

1. Includes accruals (i.e. where service has been provided but invoice not yet received)
2. This figure includes costs for 1st Appearances and other PPSNI related interpreter costs (figures supplied by PPSNI)

INTERPRETER COSTS IN NON-CRIMINAL CASES

TABLE 2
2007/8

Business Area	Spend £
Extradition	4,794
Coroners	975
Civil	-
Family	847
Total	6,616

TABLE 3
2008/9

Business Area	Spend £	County Court Division						
		Belfast	Antrim	Ards	Armagh & South Down	Craigavon	Fermanagh & Tyrone	Londonderry
RNID Civil	7,390	1,537			1,746	2,136	800	1,171
Other Agency**	169						169	
Extradition	4,086	4,086						
Coroners	1,895	157				1,237	501	
Civil	321	321						
Family	2,073	216				184	502	1,171
Total	15,943							

** For departmental prosecutions brought by other agencies such as DOE, DVLNI and TV Licensing.

TABLE 4
2009/10

Business Area	Spend £	County Court Division						
		Belfast	Antrim	Ards	Armagh & South Down	Craigavon	Fermanagh & Tyrone	Londonderry
RNID Civil	7,395	4,763		2,282		350		
Other Agency	1,564	148	312		161	214	558	171
Extradition	7,305	7,305						
Coroners	890		335		174		183	198
Civil	321				321			
Family	4,216	2,231	343	151		161	425	905
Total	21,691							

Drugs Culture Inside Prisons

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how he plans to tackle the drugs culture inside prisons.
(AQW 6505/10)

Minister of Justice: The Prison Service is continuously improving its measures.

The Service takes the issue of drugs in prison very seriously. While the most common way for drugs to enter prisons is through visits, prisoners returning from periods of temporary release are also found to have brought drugs back to the prison. The most common drugs detected are cannabis resin and illicit

tablets, while Class A drugs such as heroin and cocaine are not as serious an issue as in neighbouring jurisdictions.

Following a report published in July 2008, the Prison Service has a comprehensive strategy in place both to minimise the supply of drugs coming into prisons and to provide addiction support services to prisoners.

The addiction services comprise a clinical team led by a consultant in addiction psychiatry with the support of two addiction nurses, and a psychological intervention service provided by ADEPT (Opportunity Youth). This service, operational since autumn 2009, extends across all three prisons and works jointly to provide a range of clinical and psychosocial interventions for those who wish to address their substance misuse problem.

Measures in place to minimise the supply of drugs include:

- all visitors, staff and others entering prisons are searched;
- passive drugs dogs are used to screen visitors to prisoners;
- prisoners entering or leaving the visits room are subject to rub down or full searching;
- regular searching takes place within prisons including prisoners' cells;
- controls with regard to prisoners receiving or sending money in or out of the prison;
- use of technology including CCTV and communications equipment;
- a close working relationship with the PSNI to identify traffickers and deal with those caught in possession of drugs.

From 1 June, under recent changes to the Prison Rules, new mandatory drug testing programme using samples of urine or saliva will be introduced across the establishments. This will provide faster results, and the outcome will be carefully assessed. In addition physical works will be undertaken to reduce the scope for trafficking drugs further.

Low-copy DNA Testing

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many criminal investigations are currently stalled due to budgetary constraints on low-copy DNA testing, broken down by policing division.

(AQW 6506/10)

Minister of Justice: The use of low-copy number DNA testing in any criminal investigation is an operational decision to be taken by PSNI and therefore is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

PSNI Entry Examinations

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice to list the locations where PSNI applicants can undertake the entry examinations.

(AQW 6509/10)

Minister of Justice: Practical arrangements for recruitment are a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Contraband Items

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to list all the contraband items seized from prisoners in the last 12 months.

(AQW 6526/10)

Minister of Justice: The table below lists contraband items seized from prisoners during the period from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood	Totals
Drugs	74	40	38	152
Mobile phones	24	30	26	80
Unidentified substance - suspected drugs/medication	17	35	16	68
Phone equipment - batteries/sim cards	8	29	1	38
Potential makeshift weapons	9	8	4	21
Alcohol	5	4	2	11
Miscellaneous items - unauthorised documents	3	4	2	9
Totals	140	150	89	379

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6210/10, to detail the offences committed for each of the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs); and how many of these ASBOs have been breached.

(AQW 6534/10)

Minister of Justice: The information being sought is a matter for the relevant authorities and is not held centrally. The Anti Social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 defines anti social behaviour as acting:

‘in a manner that caused, or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one of more persons not of the same household as himself’; and as such the term ‘offences’ is inappropriate.

To provide such information would incur a disproportionate cost.

Of the 39 ASBOs listed in AQW 6210/10, 6 have been breached.

Prison Service Equality Statement and Report

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Justice if he will publish the Prison Service equality statement and report.

(AQW 6544/10)

Minister of Justice: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is fully committed to its statutory obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In line with other NICS Departments it does not have an equality statement as such. As an Agency within the Department of Justice it reports, as part of the wider Departmental Equality Scheme, on its equality duties through published Annual Progress Reports as commissioned by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The report for 2009/2010 is being collated and a copy will be placed in the library in due course.

Street Pastors Organisation

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Justice if he is aware that the Street Pastors organisation is considering operating in Northern Ireland; and if he would provide funding for this project.

(AQW 6563/10)

Minister of Justice: My Department has not been made aware that Street Pastors is considering operating in Northern Ireland nor has my Department been approached by this organisation for funding.

Any request for funding could be considered once it was clear what the project would aim to achieve against a clearly evidenced need not already being addressed through existing initiatives. Any proposal would also need to be considered against existing financial commitments.

Coroners Service for Northern Ireland Website

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice if he will arrange for details of completed inquests, including the name of the deceased, the verdict and any related recommendations, to be placed on the Coroners Service for Northern Ireland website.

(AQW 6591/10)

Minister of Justice: There are no plans at present to publish the findings of Inquests because of the personal and sensitive nature of the information involved and the possibility of causing more distress to the next of kin.

However where a coroner believes that action should be taken to prevent the recurrence of fatalities similar to the one for which an inquest was held, he may make a report to the person or authority that has power to take action. While there is currently no provision for the publication of this information in Northern Ireland this is something that I intend to review.

Dissident Terrorist Activity

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what contact he has had with officials from other parts of the UK regarding the need to address the increased level of dissident terrorist activity.

(AQW 6599/10)

Minister of Justice: To date I have had two meetings on dissident terrorist activity with NIO Ministers and officials.

Assaults on Police Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many police officers were assaulted whilst on duty in each constituency, in each of the last three years; and how many of these assaults were regarded as serious.

(AQW 6617/10)

Minister of Justice: Recording instances of assault on police officers is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Youth Conferencing with the Youth Justice Agency

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice how many children and young people in north Belfast are currently engaged in Youth Conferencing with the Youth Justice Agency.

(AQW 6620/10)

Minister of Justice: In the constituency of Belfast North, including the boundary changes from 6th April 2010, the Youth Justice Agency is currently supervising 85 young people. These young people have met with their victims at a youth conference and having agreed a reparative action plan are subject to Youth Conference Orders/plans.

Tasers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many times PSNI officers have deployed tasers since they were introduced.

(AQW 6624/10)

Minister of Justice: The deployment of tasers by PSNI officers is a matter for the Chief Constable who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond to you directly.

Minutes of High Court Meetings

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Justice whether auditable minutes are taken during High Court meetings involving solicitors and the Master; and if these minutes are countersigned by all the parties involved.
(AQW 6625/10)

Minister of Justice: Meetings between Masters and members of the legal profession about individual cases are the responsibility of the Lord Chief Justice.

The Lord Chief Justice's Office has agreed to write to the Member in respect of this matter.

Tort Law and the Human Rights Act

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether Tort law and the Human Rights Act, are being fully enforced by the High Court with regard to medical negligence.
(AQW 6627/10)

Minister of Justice: The application of the law in any case before the court is entirely a matter for the judge. If a party considers that the law has not been properly applied in a particular case in the High Court, there is a right of appeal to the Court of Appeal and in certain circumstances to the Supreme Court.

NI Court Service Employees

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of employees in the NI Court Service who are currently suspended from work; (ii) the length of time each employee has been suspended on full pay and (iii) the total cost to the Court Service in salaries, national insurance and pension contributions of these cases over the last 5 years.
(AQW 6636/10)

Minister of Justice: Three employees in the Business Operations Division in the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service are currently on precautionary suspension from work. Two Administrative Officers have been suspended on full pay, one for 24 months and 3 weeks and one for 9 weeks, and an Executive Officer for 18 months and 2 weeks. The total cost of these cases in salaries, national insurance and pension contributions to date is approximately £81,534.

A further 9 employees have been suspended within the last 5 years for various periods. These cases have now been concluded and incurred salary related costs of approximately £750k.

Department for Regional Development

A5 Western Transport Corridor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development how many hectares are to be vested for the construction of the A5 Western Transport Corridor.
(AQW 6386/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total area of land to be vested for the A5 Western Transport Corridor is currently estimated to be 1,000 hectares. The final figure will not be known until late summer this year.

This estimate includes areas of land which will be required temporarily during construction to facilitate works, such as flood compensation measures, deposition of surplus material, drainage outfalls, temporary road diversions and environmental mitigation.

Following completion of the scheme, the temporary land will be disposed of to the landowners.

These temporary areas may be omitted from the vesting order, if appropriate agreements can be made with the relevant landowners.

Ministry of Defence Housing Sites

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail any meetings held between NI Water and residents of former Ministry of Defence housing sites to assess the residents' ability to pay for upgrading the mains water and sewerage systems; and (ii) what steps he is taking to ensure that NI Water holds such meetings to reach a solution.

(AQW 6476/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has not met with residents of former Ministry of Defence housing sites to discuss their ability to pay for upgrading water and sewerage systems. It has however met with developers and developer's agents in relation to the proposed adoption of infrastructure within former Ministry of Defence sites in Ballymena, Ballykelly and Portadown. NIW will only adopt sewerage systems which meet the current specification and construction standards contained in its Sewers for Adoption Procedures. Guidance Notes about the Sewer Adoption process are available on the NIW website at www.niwater.com. Watermains may also be offered for adoption by agreement subject to their installation meeting current NIW specification and they must comply with current regulations and standards of performance for the provision of water supplies to premises in the area.

NIW would be available to meet with any residents of former Ministry of Defence housing to explain the current procedures and requirements for adoption of water or sewerage infrastructure within their sites.

Vandalism of Bus Shelters

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of vandalism of bus shelters in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6477/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In January 2001 Roads Service and the majority of district councils entered into a 15-year contract with Adshel (the bus shelter provider) for the provision of approximately 1500 bus shelters throughout the council areas involved. The provision and maintenance of these shelters are funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to the Department. The contract covers the vast majority of bus shelters here – including all those in the North Down area - and the Department has no knowledge of the costs incurred by Adshel in carrying out their contractual commitments.

Translink does not currently maintain any bus shelters in the North Down area.

Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road Junction at Castledawson

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was spent on the public inquiry on the Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road junction at Castledawson in 2007.

(AQW 6488/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the November 2007 Public Inquiry, held to examine the Toome to Castledawson Dualling Scheme, cost £64,341.72 although it is not possible to establish what proportion of the overall costs related to the Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road junction.

Traffic Warning Lights for Greyabbey Primary School

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm the completion date for the traffic warning lights for Greyabbey Primary School.

(AQW 6492/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that one of the flashing traffic warning signs erected at Greyabbey Primary School in October 2009 is to be relocated to improve its visibility to drivers.

However, there has been a delay in progressing this work due to the completion of emergency patching work in the Ards area. While I am unable to provide a definitive date as to when this work will be completed, it is anticipated that it will be completed by the end of May 2010.

Mains Water Pipe on the Tamlough Road between Randalstown and Portglenone

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development on how many occasions, in each of the last five years, has NI Water repaired the mains water pipe on the Tamlough Road between Randalstown and Portglenone; and at what cost.

(AQW 6512/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not hold records of individual water main repairs prior to 1 April 2007 and is unable to provide the information sought for 2005/06 and 2006/07. The table below shows the number of repairs to the section of water main on the Tamlough Road between Randalstown and Portglenone for the 3 years to 31 March 2010, together with an estimated cost for the work.

Year	Number of Repairs	Estimated Cost
2007/08	1	£400
2008/09	4	£1,600
2009/10	10	£4,000

NIW is currently progressing plans to replace this section of water main.

Wastewater Treatment Works

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if he can confirm that the ongoing problems at Greyabbey wastewater treatment works will be resolved within a six month period, given that similar problems were resolved within six months at the Drumaness wastewater treatment works.

(AQW 6590/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are no ongoing problems at Greyabbey Wastewater Treatment Works and a recent review of its performance has shown the Works to be operating effectively. While both Greyabbey and Drumaness Works use a similar treatment process, it would not be appropriate to compare the performance of these works as a number of factors, including the operation of the respective sewerage networks and the volumes of wastewater treated, differ substantially.

Following a number of flooding complaints in the Greyabbey area over recent months, NIW identified some issues with the sewerage network and undertook remedial action. Unfortunately, this work has not fully resolved the flooding problem therefore a more detailed study of the sewer network is required. NIW has assured me that you will be kept informed of developments as the investigation progresses.

Closure of Northern Ireland Airspace

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has been involved in any discussions regarding the closure of Northern Ireland airspace in recent weeks.

(AQW 6603/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have not been involved in discussions regarding the closure of airspace. The control of airspace over the North is a reserved matter. Decisions regarding closure are taken by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in consultation with National Air Traffic Services (NATS), the Met Office and the Department for Transport.

However I have been receiving regular updates from the Department for Transport in London, the CAA and NATS regarding flight restrictions. I have also been in direct contact with Noel Dempsey, my counterpart in the South and my Department is receiving updates on the position within Irish airspace.

General information on the current situation and the response to it has been collated by OFMDFM from all affected organisations and governments. This has been shared and discussed with relevant departments and agencies through the Civil Contingencies Group mechanism.

Saintfield Road

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department has taken to ensure that all works on the Saintfield Road are co-ordinated to minimise disruption to local residents and road users.

(AQW 6631/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a significant amount of planning is involved in the preparation of its annual works programme to ensure that all programmed utility works are carried out, as necessary, simultaneously with any scheme. However, in some circumstances, such as traffic management requirements, or public safety reasons, some utility works may be carried out in advance of a scheme.

Over the last five years, Roads Service has carried out a significant amount of essential structural maintenance on the Saintfield Road. The most recent resurfacing work was carried out in August 2009, between Ivanhoe Avenue and the Carryduff roundabout, and included the provision of a new footway/cycleway.

Over 700 information letters outlining the nature and extent of these works were delivered to residents and businesses, in advance of the work commencing. These letters provided contact details for Roads Service and the Contractor's supervisory staff, in the event of any problems occurring during the works. Information signs were also erected on the approaches to the works, and additional letters were delivered to provide up dates to residents and businesses during the works.

Before this work commenced, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) advised that a water main needed to be replaced, and Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) advised that it wished to replace a number of electric poles in the same section of the Saintfield Road. Following discussions, it was agreed that NIW would carry out the majority of its work before commencement of the resurfacing scheme, and that NIE would carry its work afterwards. This scheme was planned in such a way so as to minimise its impact upon residents, local businesses and commuters. The majority of the footway work was undertaken during week-days and at off-peak times to avoid the peak-hour commuter traffic. The carriageway resurfacing was carried out at weekends, as this involved road closures.

Work is also ongoing to form an entrance for the new Park and Ride site between Cairnshill Road and Primrose Hill. This has involved lane closures during off-peak periods, and is programmed to be complete by the summer of 2010.

Previous resurfacing schemes have been properly managed and co-ordinated by Roads Service in order to minimise the impact upon the residents, commercial communities and commuters without compromising road safety. Although there are no further plans to carry out major resurfacing works on

the Saintfield Road within the current financial year, routine maintenance will continue to be carried out, such as gully emptying

Ballynahinch Bypass

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development when funding for the Ballynahinch Bypass will be made available and when work will commence.

(AQW 6681/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass proposal is included in its Preparation Pool. This allows high priority schemes to be developed and taken through the Statutory Procedures in advance of funding being confirmed. However, subsequent progression into the Construction Programme is dependent on the satisfactory completion of the Statutory Procedures and the availability of funding at that time.

While I can confirm that work to develop the scheme, in preparation for progressing it through the Statutory Procedures is continuing, I am at present unable to advise when construction work on site is likely to commence, as the level of funding likely to be available for strategic road improvements, in future years, has not been decided.

Department for Social Development

Housing Waiting List

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently (i) on the housing waiting list; and (ii) deemed to be in housing stress in (a) Downpatrick; (b) Newcastle; (c) Castlewellan; (d) Hilltown; (e) Rathfriland; (f) Kilkeel; (g) Warrenpoint; (h) Rostrevor; and (i) Mayobridge.

(AQW 6177/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The table below provides the social housing waiting list figures, including the numbers of applicants in housing stress for the areas in question:-

Area	Applicants	Housing Stress
Downpatrick	285	132
Newcastle	267	152
Castlewellan	109	65
Hilltown	35	17
Rathfriland	55	17
Kilkeel	81	33
Warrenpoint	185	115
Rostrevor	62	37
Mayobridge	15	8

Village Renewal Area of south Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many houses in the redevelopment section of the Village Renewal Area of south Belfast had grant aided work carried out in the last two years; and (ii) how much public money was spent on each house.

(AQW 6216/10)

Minister for Social Development: No new applications for grant aid to homes in the redevelopment section of the Village have been approved since 30 April 2008, when an Urban Renewal Area was declared.

However 24 homes have had grant aided work totalling £95,836.51 completed within the last two years as these approvals pre-dated the declaration of the Urban Renewal Area and as such the Housing Executive was already committed to this work. These properties are all due for demolition.

Social Housing Dwellings

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing dwellings were completed in (i) 2008/09; and (ii) 2009/10 in each constituency.

(AQW 6232/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details social housing dwellings completed in 2008/09 and 2009/10 in each constituency:-

Constituency	2008/09	2009/10
East Antrim	6	18
North Antrim	7	8
South Antrim	32	1
Upper Bann	58	119
East Belfast	139	175
North Belfast	187	250
South Belfast	66	146
West Belfast	83	94
North Down	77	46
South Down	40	29
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	93	124
Foyle	174	71
Lagan Valley	169	143
East Londonderry	14	43
Mid Ulster	4	63
Newry and Armagh	85	94
Strangford	85	64
West Tyrone	46	16

Points System for the Allocation of Housing

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to review the points system for the allocation of housing, and giving more consideration to community infrastructure.

(AQW 6295/10)

Minister for Social Development: Allocation of social housing is based on the Common Selection Scheme which assesses and ranks applicants on the basis of individual need, taking into account factors such as intimidation, insecurity of tenure, housing conditions and health and social well-being.

While the Common Selection Scheme remains an effective and equitable system of assessing need, it is important that it takes account of recent changes to wider Northern Ireland society. My officials are currently considering plans for modernisation of the Scheme to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and I hope to be in a position to bring proposals forward later this year.

Housing Executive Discretionary Grants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of when Housing Executive Discretionary Grants may be re-instated.
(AQW 6298/10)

Minister for Social Development: The budget allocation for 2010/11 has been allocated to meet both outstanding commitments, together with in year mandatory grant requirements (Disabled Facilities Grants and Repairs). As in 2009/10 there will be no in-year approvals for grants other than for the mandatory grants and exceptional discretionary grants.

The mandatory grants - Disabled Facilities Grants, which provide adaptations to enable disabled people to remain in their home; and Repairs Grants, approved on foot of Statutory Notices, will continue to operate normally.

I will continue to bid in future monitoring rounds to protect the housing agenda.

Neighbourhood Wardens

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many neighbourhood wardens currently operate in North Down; (ii) the areas for which they are responsible; and (iii) if she has any plans to introduce more wardens in the area.
(AQW 6338/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently two Neighbourhood Wardens in North Down and they operate across the following areas:-

- Kilcooley/ Ferngrove
- Rathgill/Willowbrook
- Clandeboye/ Woodgreen
- Holywood
- Conlig/ Breezemount
- Bloomfield
- Whitehill/ Clanmorris/ Lisnabreen
- Groomsport
- Jubilee
- Crawfordsburn/ Helens Bay

There are currently no plans to introduce any further Neighbourhood Wardens in North Down.

Housing Benefit Payments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the total amount of Housing Benefit payments (i) by constituency; and (ii) by District Council area, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6339/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. The table below provides the information by Housing Executive District Office area, for the period 2005/06 to 2009/10.

District Office *	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Belfast	£98,645,894.88	£104,444,591.99	£110,188,795.87	£120,958,044.70	£130,578,496.66
Bangor District (North Down)	£11,134,484.44	£11,632,577.16	£12,194,048.76	£12,834,893.22	£14,525,435.53
Newtownards District	£12,113,485.54	£12,893,575.90	£13,480,741.19	£14,788,292.30	£16,647,665.62
Castlereagh District	£8,909,790.34	£9,191,004.94	£9,603,670.98	£10,430,742.95	£11,323,321.91
Lisburn District 1 (Lisburn)	£11,187,071.93	£11,693,629.88	£12,611,738.38	£14,157,560.34	£16,274,319.20
Lisburn District 3 (Lisburn)	£8,155,931.63	£8,636,039.56	£9,371,634.98	£10,015,844.02	£10,561,293.55
Downpatrick District (Down)	£12,566,079.90	£13,705,650.08	£14,564,773.53	£15,898,470.72	£17,967,481.15
Banbridge District	£6,680,344.19	£7,220,138.30	£7,464,979.46	£8,323,262.81	£9,301,734.72
Newry District (Newry & Mourne)	£20,750,963.89	£21,132,179.39	£21,829,025.65	£23,274,799.35	£26,057,732.64
Armagh District	£9,188,677.25	£9,475,994.22	£9,719,127.20	£10,644,254.43	£11,951,634.38
Lurgan District (Craigavon)	£12,459,250.96	£13,176,722.29	£13,734,016.25	£15,334,844.12	£17,125,733.08
Portadown District (Craigavon)	£7,695,717.83	£8,095,317.61	£8,386,720.50	£9,284,322.27	£10,116,478.67
Dungannon District	£8,552,807.39	£8,942,346.33	£9,484,393.90	£10,440,414.72	£11,976,537.99
Fermanagh District	£9,833,285.48	£10,043,638.10	£10,458,593.27	£11,290,892.96	£13,504,971.01
Ballymena District	£10,740,367.68	£11,184,895.97	£11,518,924.22	£12,177,141.14	£14,188,312.27
Antrim District	£7,579,421.76	£7,713,173.26	£8,041,751.26	£8,685,683.05	£10,511,348.37
Newtownabbey District 1 (N'abbey)	£6,650,227.14	£6,837,803.53	£7,012,994.71	£7,344,033.22	£8,648,127.96
Newtownabbey District 2 (N'abbey)	£7,245,662.24	£7,667,930.93	£7,953,484.36	£8,302,555.42	£9,756,120.23
Carrickfergus District	£6,622,276.30	£6,958,179.34	£7,393,808.11	£7,921,856.74	£9,167,773.66
Larne District	£6,108,894.26	£6,251,295.98	£6,431,892.48	£6,966,676.12	£8,463,736.28
Ballycastle District (Moyle)	£3,872,424.91	£4,045,310.82	£4,255,154.08	£4,474,216.99	£5,312,441.76

District Office *	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Ballymoney District	£5,467,589.98	£5,812,275.42	£6,032,714.50	£6,419,148.12	£7,670,070.38
Coleraine District	£12,043,920.02	£12,694,553.67	£13,467,204.22	£14,930,441.18	£16,778,688.05
Waterloo Place (Derry)	£15,323,047.45	£15,832,645.69	£16,450,973.63	£17,974,402.39	£19,559,639.03
Waterside District (Derry)	£14,396,865.18	£15,293,830.71	£15,850,148.00	£16,772,796.42	£18,309,156.94
Collon Terrace District (Derry)	£13,758,540.17	£14,523,999.72	£15,264,108.56	£16,135,681.62	£17,271,285.80
Limavady District	£6,570,535.49	£6,937,421.40	£7,219,916.57	£8,212,978.52	£9,859,264.71
Magherafelt District	£5,455,539.36	£5,478,442.20	£5,831,310.44	£6,498,851.55	£7,859,839.09
Strabane District	£10,788,774.63	£11,594,338.68	£12,289,212.34	£13,452,850.85	£15,321,750.61
Omagh District	£10,547,797.81	£11,025,622.62	£11,388,582.70	£12,403,640.94	£13,814,263.77
Cookstown District	£5,164,881.01	£5,350,712.95	£5,685,093.23	£6,523,745.44	£7,669,721.07

*NIHE District Offices correspond to the relevant local government areas (except where indicated).

Block Grant for Fuel Poverty

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding each Department received from the block grant for fuel poverty in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 6373/10)

Minister for Social Development: The following table shows the block grant funding for fuel poverty from 2007/08 to 2009/10.

Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Total £m	43.9	34.4	35.5

Co-Ownership Budget

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what the Co-Ownership budget is for the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 6395/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) started this year with a grant of £15 million. They will use the £15 million grant along with external finance to achieve the Programme for Government target of assisting 500 applicants this year.

Shared Surface Schemes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to address the concerns of blind and partially sighted people in relation to shared surface schemes.

(AQW 6403/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department does not have any plans at present to develop shared surface schemes in Northern Ireland within our Urban Regeneration remit. All DSD's schemes are Equality Assessed and involve thorough consultation with an array of interested groups and organisations representing, among others, blind and partially sighted people. Any expressed views and concerns are taken into account as far as possible in arriving at a final scheme design.

My colleague, Conor Murphy MLA, Minister for Regional Development, has advised me that in January 2009 the Department for Transport commissioned a wide ranging, two year research project on shared surfaces, on which DRD are represented at Project Board level. The purpose of this research, amongst others, is to investigate how shared surfaces can be made to work for people with disabilities, particularly those who are blind or partially sighted.

One of the key outputs from this programme of research is expected to be a comprehensive guidance document on the design and provision of shared surfaces. I will consider the outcomes and recommendations along with Minister Murphy when they become available.

Housing Association Guide

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development if she is aware that sub-contractors are losing business because of slow and part payment by Housing Associations for completed work; and if she is satisfied that the Housing Association Guide is being implemented.

(AQW 6408/10)

Minister for Social Development: Part 4 of the Department's Housing Association Guide, requires Housing Associations to operate a prompt payment policy (current Departmental guidance requires payment to be made within 30 days) to all contractors and subsequently requires all contractors to make prompt payments to their sub-contractors. Compliance with this guidance is checked as part of the Department's Inspection Process. However, there is no legal liability on Housing Associations to enforce the prompt payment provisions in any sub-contract.

Executive's Prompt Payment Policy

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of whether Housing Associations are complying with the Executive's prompt payment policy.

(AQW 6409/10)

Minister for Social Development: Housing Associations, through the Regulation and Inspection process, are assessed during inspections as to whether they are complying with Prompt Payment. These inspections reveal that Associations are complying with the Prompt Payment target of 30 days.

Paying Suppliers

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development whether her Department is committed to, and compliant in, paying suppliers within 10-days of the receipt of valid invoices.

(AQW 6410/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is fully committed to the 10 day prompt payment of supplier invoices and I have sought and been given assurance that the Department and its sponsored bodies are taking all appropriate actions.

The actual prompt payment performance for my Department over the period January 2010 to March 2010 is shown below. The Department exceeded the average prompt payment performance for all NICS Departments during this period.

Month	Department for Social Development
January	53%
February	60%
March	71%

My officials continue to work with Account NI colleagues to identify issues and recommend improvements to the current payment process.

Housing Association Guide

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development how the Housing Association Guide compares to the NEC3 contract adopted by the Central Procurement Directorate.

(AQW 6411/10)

Minister for Social Development: The current review to the Procurement section of the Housing Association Guide will require Housing Association's to use the NEC3 form of contract for all construction related procurement. The new guidance will be available from June 2010.

Housing Associations

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development if Housing Associations are applying the measures agreed by the Construction Industry Forum aimed at improving the speed of payments to sub-contractors.

(AQW 6412/10)

Minister for Social Development: The measures referred to are currently being incorporated into the procurement part of the Housing Association Guide, which will be available at the end of June 2010.

Housing Executive Design Group

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development why the Housing Executive Design Group satellite based in Omagh is to be closed and centralised in Belfast, given that the staff were only allocated to their posts in June 2009.

(AQW 6435/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Omagh Design Group was set up on 1st June 2009 with the overall restructuring of Design and Property services being completed in July 2009. It was agreed that a further review would be carried out in approximately six months to ensure structures were correct in line with budgets and resources etc. Given the downturn in the Housing Executive's capital budget the workload and fee earning capacity of the Design Group satellite based in Omagh has been greatly reduced. To make the Design Group sustainable for the future, it is necessary to reduce the number of technical and administration staff within the Group and to offer them alternative appropriate employment in other parts of the Housing Executive. Because of the revised staff numbers in the Design Group it is no longer sustainable to have the group split across two sites with the associated overheads.

Housing Executive Design Group

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development what savings will be made by moving the Housing Executive Design Group satellite services from Omagh to Belfast.

(AQW 6436/10)

Minister for Social Development: The closure of the current services provided from Omagh will account for savings totalling £348,732.

Housing Executive Design Group

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development what alternative arrangements will be made for the staff of the Housing Executive Design Group satellite to allow them to work near Omagh.

(AQW 6437/10)

Minister for Social Development: Where there is a surplus of staff to be redeployed, the Housing Executive's Redeployment of Staff procedures will be applied in consultation with the Trade Union. The Housing Executive's policy is to take all reasonable measures to absorb surplus staff by redeployment in the interests of staff and the Housing Executive. While individual preferences will be accommodated as far as possible, this will be dependent on the availability of posts at any particular time and the co-operation of staff in managing the redeployment process.

Housing Executive Design Group

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development how the centralisation of the Housing Executive Design Services to Belfast will affect service delivery in the west of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 6438/10)

Minister for Social Development: The closure of the Design Group sub-office in Omagh and the delivery of the core service from Belfast will not affect the delivery of the service in the west of Northern Ireland. The service delivery will be in line with the Housing Executive's guidelines and no-one will be disadvantaged by the changes.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Funding

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if she intends to increase the Small Pockets of Deprivation funding for the Glen Estate, the West Winds Estate and the Bowtown Estate in Newtownards; and by how much.

(AQW 6442/10)

Minister for Social Development: I announced a one-year extension to the Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) programme for the 2010/11 financial year in December 2009. A funding package of £415,000 (based on the financial outturn of the 2009/10 programme) was set aside to continue the funding of running costs for community centres and salaries for staff employed through the SPOD programme. I have no intention of increasing this level of funding. Applications have been received from these three estates and their claims have been met in full. These estates have received the following awards from the SPOD programme for the financial year 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011:

- Bowtown – Running costs for the Community centre, a total award of £5,790;
- Glen estate – Salary costs of £8,762 and office costs of £5,672, a total award of £14,432
- West Winds – Running costs of Youth Club of £1,770 and running costs for Community office of £4,400, a total award of £6,170.

Housing Associations

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development if Housing Associations require their main contractors to subscribe to a Fair Payment Charter for all new construction works, similar to that applied by the construction industry since 1 March 2010.

(AQW 6463/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Government Construction Clients Group (GCCG) and the Construction Industry Group for Northern Ireland (CIGNI) have agreed proposals for the introduction of a Fair Payment Charter to be applied to construction procurement activity which is undertaken after 1 March 2010, and which is governed by Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. This requirement will be included in the new revision to the Housing Association Guide which will be available from June 2010.

Housing Associations

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development what arrangements Housing Associations have in place to monitor contractors' performance, including the work and payment of sub-contractors.

(AQW 6464/10)

Minister for Social Development: Housing Associations monitor contractors' performance through the use of Construction line, inspections of contracts by Clerk of Works and by holding monthly site meetings with all key stakeholders including sub-contractors and suppliers. It is not incumbent upon any Association to directly monitor the work or payment of sub-contractors as the Association is not a party to these domestic sub-contracts.

Poor Payment Performance by a Subcontractor

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development whether her Department, when made aware of poor payment performance by a subcontractor, can enforce the appropriate terms of the contract to resolve the issue, as is the case with other Departments.

(AQW 6465/10)

Minister for Social Development: As the Department is not a party to the contract between the sub-contractor and any subsequent supplier of goods or services the Department cannot enforce any of the terms of the contract.

However, Housing Associations compliance with prompt payment guidance is checked as part of the Departments Inspection process.

Licensed Premises

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development what is the standard fine and any additional penalty imposed on owners or staff of licensed premises convicted of selling alcohol outside licensing

hours; and how many convictions are permitted before a licensee is permanently banned from operating.

(AQW 6468/10)

Minister for Social Development: Under the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, a licensee or member of staff convicted of selling alcohol outside the permitted hours faces a fine not exceeding level 5 (£5000) on the standard scale. Where a licensee is convicted of selling alcohol outside the permitted hours on 2 occasions within 5 years, a court must (unless satisfied that there are extenuating circumstances) suspend the licence for not less than 1 week or more than 3 months. There is no provision for a licensee to be permanently banned from operating for a set number of convictions but a court has the power to refuse to renew a licence for reasons which include the manner in which the business has been conducted and the fitness of the person to hold a licence.

Community Workers in North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development which housing estates in North Down have a community worker who is wholly or part funded by her Department.

(AQW 6474/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive currently fund part time community workers in both the Bloomfield and Breezemount estates. The Neighbourhood Renewal Development funds one community development worker, employed by the Kilcooley Community Forum, in the Kilcooley estate in North Down. The Regional Development Office, through the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme, also funds a community worker post and a Social Economy Officer post in Rathgill estate in Bangor. The Regional Development Office also funds a co-ordinator post for community programmes based in the YMCA which is located in the Harbour area in Bangor town centre and is not estate-specific.

Housing Executive Design Group

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development why the Housing Executive design office in Omagh is to close; and what consideration has been given to the impact of the closure on staff working in the office and people in West Tyrone.

(AQW 6489/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Omagh Design Group was set up on 1 June 2009 with the overall restructuring of Design and Property services being completed in July 2009. It was agreed that a further review would be carried out in approximately six months to ensure structures were correct in line with budgets and resources etc. Given the downturn in the Housing Executive's capital budget the workload and fee earning capacity of the Design Group satellite based in Omagh has been greatly reduced. To make the Design Group sustainable for the future, it is necessary to reduce the number of technical and administration staff within the Group and to offer them alternative appropriate employment in other parts of the Housing Executive. Because of the revised staff numbers in the Design Group it is no longer sustainable to have the group split across two sites with the associated overheads. In relation to the impact on staff, where there is a surplus of staff to be redeployed the Housing Executive's Redeployment of Staff procedures will be applied in consultation with the Trade Union. The Housing Executive's policy is to take all reasonable measures to absorb surplus staff by redeployment in the interests of staff and the Housing Executive. In relation to the impact on people in West Tyrone, the closure of the Design Group sub-office in Omagh and the delivery of the core service from Belfast will not affect the delivery of the service in the west of Northern Ireland. The delivery will be in line with the Housing Executive's guidelines and no-one will be disadvantaged by the changes.

Social Fund Funeral Payment

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 6234/10, if she will consider extending the time limit for the Social Fund Funeral payment.

(AQW 6501/10)

Minister for Social Development: The time limit for claims for Funeral Payments is already very generous. Claims are accepted from the date of death up to 3 months following the date of the funeral thus allowing a degree of flexibility for those occasions on which a funeral can be delayed.

There are no plans to extend the current time-limit.

Fold Housing Association Social Housing Scheme at Skeoge Road, Derry

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has provided funding for the Fold Housing Association social housing scheme at Skeoge Road, Derry; and what conditions are built into the contract to ensure fair pay and conditions for subcontractors working on the scheme.
(AQW 6536/10)

Minister for Social Development: I am pleased that my Department has been able to make nearly £12 million available to support the delivery of 124 new family homes at Skeoge Road, Derry. Work began in March this year and is expected to last 15 months. Our new Procurement Strategy for the Social Housing Development Programme ensures that the procurement of all social housing either in Skeoge or elsewhere embraces construction procurement best practice. This includes recent proposals of the Construction Industry Forum (CIFNI) Procurement Task Group Report Addendum specifically in relation to fair pay and conditions.

Financial Position of Pensioners

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to seek better pension arrangements to improve the financial position of pensioners.
(AQW 6543/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 introduced a programme of reforms aimed at making the State Pension fairer, more accessible and improving its coverage and generosity; particularly for women and carers. For those reaching State Pension age on or after 6 April 2010, the number of qualifying years required for a full basic State Pension was reduced to thirty for both men and women. A new weekly National Insurance credit will help carers build entitlement to the basic State Pension, State Second Pension and certain Bereavement Benefits. Furthermore, the legislation is in place to enable the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to restore the link between the up-rating of State Pension and earnings.

The Pensions (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 made provision for employers to enrol all eligible employees into a qualifying workplace pension scheme from 2012. This will provide employees with access to a workplace pension scheme funded by employee, employer and government contributions. Individuals will be given the opportunity to build a private pension to supplement retirement income received from the State, many of them gaining access for the first time.

Pension Credit remains a key part of the overall strategy for tackling pensioner poverty. I will continue to liaise with my counterpart in the Department for Work and Pensions to seek the best possible deal for pensioners.

Magherafelt Social Security Office Staff

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what consultation took place with Magherafelt Social Security Office staff as part of the Customer First programme; and to outline the time-line of this process.
(AQW 6568/10)

Minister for Social Development: Since the inception in 2006 of the Strategic Business Review (SBR), the Social Security Agency has consulted extensively with staff and trade union representatives.

This included formal public consultation (November 2008), Equality Impact Assessment of implementation arrangements (April – June 2009), concluding with consultation on local arrangements for staff relocation in Magherafelt Social Security Office in March 2010.

Customer First Programme

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost benefit analysis of the Customer First programme, with particular reference to the proposals for Magherafelt Social Security Office.
(AQW 6570/10)

Minister for Social Development: A cost benefit analysis has been completed in respect of the Customer First programme. It has been conducted on a Programme basis and therefore it is not appropriate to isolate an individual Business Processing Centre within the overall analysis.

Customer First Programme

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff have been moved (i) from; and (ii) to Magherafelt Social Security Office under the Customer First Programme; and how many more are expected to be moved.

(AQW 6571/10)

Minister for Social Development: Under Customer First a total of 41 North District staff were relocated to Magherafelt. A total of 12 staff from other support functions moved out of Magherafelt. There are no plans to move any further staff to Magherafelt Benefit Processing Centre.

PSNI Investigation into the Nelson Street Site

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development when she anticipates the PSNI investigation into the Nelson Street site will be completed.

(AQW 6622/10)

Minister for Social Development: I am not in a position to comment on how long the PSNI investigation may take.

Maintenance of Housing Association and Housing Executive Properties

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development what measures she will take to address the inequality between the maintenance of Housing Association properties and Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 6672/10)

Minister for Social Development: I do not accept that measures are necessary to address what are basically different funding mechanisms for the management and maintenance of Housing Executive and Housing Association properties.

The preliminary results from the 2009 House Condition Survey indicate that unfitness in social housing is decreasing significantly and in effect there is no difference in the fitness levels of homes provided by either Housing Executive or Housing Association movement.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Accessibility

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission what discussions it has had with disability organisations to ensure that facilities and services available within Parliament Buildings and its precincts are accessible to everyone.

(AQO 1225/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): A major programme of physical works was carried out to Parliament Buildings in 2006 to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

This work included extensive alterations to lifts, staircases and handrails and followed recommendations in an Accessibility Audit carried out by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and consultation with representatives of disability organisations including Disability Action, Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

More recently, refurbishment work to the Assembly Chamber, in summer 2008, included provision of level access to the floor of the chamber and the installation of a wheelchair viewing platform and platform hoist to the Public Gallery.

All of the public areas in Parliament Buildings, including the Great Hall, Long Gallery and committee meeting rooms are fitted with induction loop systems to facilitate persons with hearing difficulties. There are also current plans to provide an additional toilet for disabled people at Ground Floor Level and to appoint Adapt (NI) and RNIB to carry out further accessibility audits.

The NI Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for NI on 27 February 2008 and prior to approval consultation took place with disability organisations. In addition the Commission's current Disability Action Plan also includes consultation with disability organisations.

More recently the Commission has completed a consultation exercise on the screening of its policies and through this process disability organisations were consulted in order to gather views on our policies and practices. Consultation with organisations is ongoing and representatives of disability organisations sit on the Disability Advisory Group, which is chaired by the Commission's Equality Manager, in order to discuss issues such as facilities and services and to input into policy.

In addition, a representative of the Assembly's Education Service also discusses accessibility with all participants in the education programme at the time of booking to enable special requirements to be met.

Parliament Buildings: Car Parking

Mr J McCallister asked the Assembly Commission if it will take immediate emergency action to address the car parking situation on sitting days.

(AQO 1226/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly Commission fully acknowledges the difficulties experienced in parking in the car parks, particularly on sitting days.

All car parks within the Stormont Estate are however owned and managed by DFP. Whilst access to the upper car parks at Parliament Buildings is restricted to Assembly use only, the Assembly does not have exclusive access to or use of the Lower East car park and therefore cannot reserve it solely for Assembly use.

The Commission has however requested that the Secretariat engages with DFP to establish if there are any other measures that can be taken to resolve this problem. These negotiations are well underway. The Director of Facilities also participates in a regular working group with DFP personnel and has also been in direct contact with senior officials in DFP with a view to dealing strategically with the perennial problem of car parking facilities available for the Assembly's use.

For your further information, DFP is carrying out a full audit of car parking on the Stormont Estate and will report back to the Director of Facilities on completion of that exercise.

Stormont Estate

Mr D Kinahan asked the Assembly Commission if it has entered into any negotiations with the owners of the Stormont Estate to increase the space directly under the Assembly's control.

(AQO 1220/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): In response to your question there have been no discussions between Assembly officials and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), who own the Stormont Estate, with regard to increasing the space directly under the Assembly's control.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 21 May 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Funding for Childcare Provision

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of funding provided by the Executive for childcare provision in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6334/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Childcare here in Northern Ireland is funded through many different routes, some of which provide childcare directly and others indirectly. The apportionment of funding to these different services however is not broken down by the various elements within the service. 'Surestart', for example, has an important childcare element but this is not its primary function. Therefore, 'family services' may often provide an element of childcare that is not separately quantified.

A second issue is the difficulty of apportioning staff costs to childcare related functions. For example, DHSSPS staff engaged in the process of vetting, inspection and registration of childcare places are not providing childcare directly.

There are however a number of functions that are directly related to childcare where financial information is available and these are outlined in the table below.

Programme/Dept.	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	Total
Rural Childcare Programme (DARD)	£ N/A	£ N/A	£1.3m	£1.3m
NICMA Funding (DE)	£68k	£69k	£70k	£207k
Steps to Work Programme – The Childcare Allowance Scheme (DEL)	£587K	£585K	£633K	£1.8m
Further Education-Care to Learn (DEL)	£150K	£326K	£351K	£827k
Further Education Awards (DEL) *	£99K	£213K	£379k	£691k
Further Education - Support Funds (DEL)	£111K	£137K	£ Not available until July 2010	£248k
European Social Fund (DEL)	£230K	£394K	£383K	£1.0m
Children and Young People's Fund (DSD)	£881K	N/A	N/A	£881k
The Women's Centres Childcare Fund (DSD)	£ N/A	£850K	£889K	£1.7m
Neighbourhood Renewal – Childcare element (DSD)	£630K (est)	£630K (est)	£630K (est)	£1.9m (est)
Gingerbread (Derry) Funding (DSD)	£ N/A	£ N/A	£19K	£19k

Programme/Dept.	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	Total
Overall Total	£2.8m (est)	£3.2m (est)	£4.7m (est)	£10.6m (est)

* FE Awards relate to the childcare costs of students and are not just FE awards i.e. student grants.

In addition to the above, approximately 15,000 in-work recipient families are beneficiaries of the childcare element of the working tax credit with an average weekly amount in payment of £82.61 which equates to approximately £1.23 million per week.

An economic appraisal, considering a range of strategic options for childcare provision here, will soon be presented to officials. The appraisal report will then be considered by Ministers and copied to the OFMDFM Committee. It is expected that this report will detail a wide range of direct and indirect costs relating to childcare provision here.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr J Shannon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy and programme.

(AQW 6530/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We agreed the core of the programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration on 23 February 2010. Officials have circulated a draft copy of the document to devolved departments including the newly formed Department of Justice for the input of policies, programmes and activities that will begin to construct the cross-cutting elements of the programme.

Departmental replies have begun to come in and officials in OFMDFM are continuing the development of the document with this material. A more complete version of the draft programme will be referred to the Assembly Committee and considered by the Executive.

The programme will then be the subject of a full public consultation which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development.

The public consultation is likely to begin in June 2010 and continue until at least the end of September.

Once the responses to the consultation have been collated they will be taken on board within the context of a revised text as appropriate. The redrafted programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and the Executive for final clearance.

It is anticipated that the final agreed programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration will be published before the end of the year.

The Assembly Ombudsman

Mr J Shannon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the protocol for MPs wishing to contact, or make referrals to, the Assembly Ombudsman.

(AQW 6532/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Ombudsman deals with complaints from people who believe they have suffered injustice as a result of maladministration by government departments and public bodies in Northern Ireland. The current powers and responsibilities of the Ombudsman are laid down in the Ombudsman (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Commissioner for Complaints (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

The jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman relates to specified Northern Ireland bodies. Those bodies fall within the competence of the Assembly. This is why the Ombudsman (NI) Order 1996 makes provision for complaints to be referred to the Ombudsman by MLAs rather than MPs.

All complaints, whether made by a member of the public or an MP, must be referred to the Ombudsman by a Member of the Assembly (MLA). A completed complaint form, or letter of complaint, should be sent to the individual's chosen MLA, asking him/her to refer the complaint to the Ombudsman. In such cases, all correspondence from the Ombudsman will be sent to the chosen MLA, who will then ensure that the complainant is kept informed of progress.

Honours System

Mr J Shannon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they have any plans to introduce an honours system for Northern Ireland separate, but similar, to the system used for the whole of the UK. **(AQW 6533/10)**

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have no plans to introduce an alternative to the current system but remain open to further consideration.

Honours are an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Ciubotaru v Moldov Judgement by the European Court of Human Rights

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the implications, for fair employment monitoring and the residual method for assigning identity, of the Ciubotaru v Moldova (application no. 27138/04) judgement by the European Court of Human Rights. **(AQW 6552/10)**

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Ciubotaru case dealt with a specific issue within the Moldovan legal system and the decision of the European Court was highly dependent on the individual facts of the case. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to respect for private and family life), like most Convention Articles, does not confer absolute rights. In limiting such rights, the Court will look for a legal basis for the interference, whether the interference seeks to achieve a legitimate aim and whether the interference is in response to a pressing social need.

Monitoring the community background of the workforce here is a requirement of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations which are made under that Order. Fair employment monitoring was introduced to enable the composition of those who belong to the Protestant or the Roman Catholic community to be ascertained. Such monitoring is essential to enable the proper assessment of progress being made towards fair participation in the workforce by both communities.

The European Court accepts that there are areas in which national authorities are in a better position to decide what is best for their people. It is for each state to balance the rights and to act proportionally and for good reason in interfering with such rights. We believe that the Ciubotaru case does not invalidate the current system we have for recording and monitoring the community background of employees in Northern Ireland.

Attorney General

Mr T Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect to appoint the Attorney General. **(AQW 6597/10)**

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have consulted with the new Advocate General on our proposed appointment, in accordance with paragraph 13 of Schedule 7 to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. We intend to make an appointment to this office in the near future.

Community Relations Budget

Mrs N Long asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they, or their officials, have had regarding the potential impact of a 70% reduction in the community relations budget within the Department of Education, given their overall responsibility for community relations.

(AQW 6615/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Officials in OFMDFM were informed of the cuts proposed by Minister Ruane. Discussions are ongoing on the Department of Education's contribution to the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the expenditure to date by their Department on (i) the Maze/Long Kesh site in total; (ii) the Maze/Long Kesh Master Plan; and (iii) the implementation strategy.

(AQW 6704/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The expenditure on the Maze/Long Kesh site to 30 April 2010 is £12.48m. Of this, £0.58m was spent on the 2006 Masterplan instituted under direct rule. We announced on 8 April 2009 that this Masterplan would not proceed in its original form. The remaining £11.9m was spent on work associated with the 2006 Masterplan, on a major programme of demolition and essential remediation of contamination, site maintenance and security costs as well as preparatory work by the Maze/Long Kesh Programme Delivery Unit (PDU) on a potential fresh implementation strategy. We provided details of the PDU's costs in our reply to AQ 4827.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list all bodies that have been established by their Department in relation to the Maze/Long Kesh site; and to outline the total cost to date of establishing and running these bodies.

(AQW 6716/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We refer the Member to the answers given to AQW 4824/10 and AQW 4827/10.

Sustainable Development Commissioner

Ms D Purvis asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect to have a Sustainable Development Commissioner in place; and to outline the reasons for the delay in making the appointment.

(AQW 6821/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The appointment of a Commissioner, within the Sustainable Development Commission, is an integral part of our plans to advance and promote sustainable development within government and beyond.

A competitive selection process has been conducted and we are currently considering candidates with a view to recommending the appointment of a Commissioner, in line with Sustainable Development Commission recruitment practices.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 6704/10, whether the £11.9m expenditure was paid solely by their Department or in conjunction with another Department.

(AQW 6823/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The £11.9m was spent solely by our Department on work at the Maze/Long Kesh site as detailed in our answer to you to AQW 6704/10, dated 17 May 2010.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Glastry Ice Cream

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department has helped Glastry Ice Cream with the promotion of its new lavender flavour.

(AQW 6800/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): Strict EU State Aid rules place severe constraints on the use of Government funds for promotional activities for local produce. Therefore DARD cannot provide direct funding for the marketing or advertising of a company's produce in the north of Ireland.

My Department, operates the NI Regional Food Programme (NIRFP), which provides financial support to 'not for profit' agri-food groups, to help promote quality regional food. Through groups who benefited from this programme, Glastry Farm have had the opportunity to avail of promotional and sales opportunities at events such as the Magherafelt Christmas Fair, Taste of Ulster Artisan Forum and the Balmoral Show.

Glastry Farm have used the technical services provided by my Department through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) at Loughry Campus. In 2009, CAFRE technologists were asked by the company, to develop a signature ice cream for The National Trust's Mountstewart Estate, using flavours that could be grown or sourced within the Estate's gardens. Following trials and tastings, the raspberry & lavender ice cream was chosen as the exclusive ice cream.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Libraries NI

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would consider reviewing the extension of the retirement age for employees of Libraries NI.

(AQW 6673/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): Libraries NI (LNI) operates a retirement procedure that ensures that staff aged 65 have the right to request to work beyond normal retirement age for a fixed or indefinite period. This procedure is based on the retirement requirements set out in the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

In considering the requests the Employer (LNI) may (1) approve the request; (2) approve a compromise extension period; or (3) refuse the request.

All decisions taken are based on the business needs of the organisation. It is an open and transparent process. The application of this procedure is an operational issue for Libraries NI.

Department of Education

Gaelscoil na Speiríní, Draperstown

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been allocated to Gaelscoil na Speiríní, Draperstown, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6640/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Leagtar amach sa tábla thíos an cistiú a leithdháileadh ar Ghaelscoil na Speiríní sna cúig bliana a chuaigh thart. Seasann na figiúirí don bhliain 2006-07 go dtí an bhliain 2008-09 do gach cistiú athfhillteach don scoil, ó ráitis fhoilsithe Táirgeachta Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt. Tá sonraí Táirgeachta don bhliain 2009-10 faoi choinníoll ag an

dáta seo. Soláthraítear sa tábla leithdháileadh tosaigh buiséid don scoil fosta, a leithdháiltear faoi shocrúithe na Foirmle Coitinn Cistithe (FCC), don bhliain airgeadais reatha 2010/11.

The table below sets out the funding allocated to Gaelscoil na Speiríní in the last five years. Figures for 2006-07 to 2008-09 represent all recurrent funding for the school, from the North Eastern Education & Library Board published Outturn statements. Outturn data for 2009-10 is provisional at this date. The table also provides the initial budget allocation for the school, distributed under the Common Funding Formula (CFF) arrangements, for the current 2010/11 financial year.

£000'S

2006/07 ⁽¹⁾	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
67	125	138	146	134

Notes

- (1) Gaelscoil na Speiríní established for grant-aid funding from September 2006
- (2) Funding allocations in 2007-08 onwards excludes carry-over from previous financial year
- (3) Provisional for 2009/10

Gaelscoil na Speiríní, Draperstown

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the in-take of pupils; and (ii) the number of teachers and classroom assistants employed at Gaelscoil na Speiríní, in each of the last five years **(AQW 6641/10)**

Minister of Education: Rinneadh scoil dheontaschúnta de Ghaelscoil na Speiríní sa bhliain 2006/07. Roimhe sin, bhí sí ina scoil neamhspleách. Tá cúntóir ranga amháin a oibríonn 20 uair in aghaidh na seachtaine ag an scoil sa bhliain 2009/10. Léirítear sa tábla thíos eolas ar iontógáil daltaí, ar rollú agus ar líon na múinteoirí.

Gaelscoil na Speiríní became grant-aided in 2006/07. Prior to that, it existed as an independent school. The school has one classroom assistant working 20 hours per week in 2009/10. Information on pupil intake, enrolment and teacher numbers is displayed in the table below.

GAELSCOIL NA SPEIRÍNÍ – ENROLMENTS 2006/07 – 2009/10

Year	Year 1 enrolment	Total enrolment	Full-time equivalent teachers
2006/07	12	21	2
2007/08	5	23	2
2008/09	4	24	2
2009/10	12	24	3

Note:

- 1 Enrolment figures are sourced from the school census.
- 2 Teacher information is derived from the annual Pupil:Teacher Ratio statistical return.
- 3 Information on the number of classroom assistants was supplied by the North Eastern Education and Library Board.

Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education how she intends to accommodate pupils at Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey in the long-term.

(AQW 6652/10)

Minister of Education: Thug mé údarás do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt an conradh chun scoil nua a thógáil la haghaidh Whitehouse Primary School a bhronnadh. Ba chóir go n-éascódh sé seo tús a chur le hobair foirgníochta laistigh de roinnt seachtainí. Ba chóir go gcuirfí deireadh leis an scoil nua roimh fhómhar na bliana seo chugainn.

I have authorised the North Eastern Education and Library Board to award the contract for the new build school for Whitehouse Primary School. This should enable construction work to begin within a few weeks. The new school should be completed by the autumn of next year.

Preschool Nursery Provision

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the level of pre-school nursery provision in each Education and Library Board area; and (ii) for her assessment of whether this provision is sufficient to meet the demand.

(AQW 6676/10)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Léirítear sa tábla líon na n-áiteanna cistithe réamhscoile atá ar fáil faoi láthair don scoilbhliain 2010/11. Úsáidtear cóhort P1 na scoilbhliana reatha mar sheachtháscaire chun leibhéal an tsoláthair réamhscoile a áireamh don bhliain ina diaidh sin i ngach limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne. Meastar go bhfuil an cur chuige seo ar an chur chuige is cruinne maidir le hiarracht a dhéanamh ar éileamh ar áiteanna sa todhchaí a thuair. Tugtar faoi deara, áfach, go n-athraíonn na figiúirí ó bhliain go bliain agus féadann tuismitheoirí a chur isteach ar áiteanna lasmuigh den limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ina gcónaíonn siad.
- (ii) The table below shows the number of funded pre-school places currently available for the 2010/11 school year. The level of available pre-school provision in each Education and Library Board area is calculated using the current school year's P1 cohort as a proxy indicator for the following year. This method is considered to be the most accurate in trying to predict future demand for places. However, it should be noted that numbers vary from year to year and parents can apply for places outside of the Education and Library Board area in which they live.

	No. of places in Statutory Sector	No. of funded places in Voluntary/ Private Sector	Total No. of funded places available in 2010/11	P1 numbers in current school year - 2009/10	% level of provision available (using 2009/10 P1 cohort as a proxy)
BELB	2834	552	3386	3269	103.58
WELB	2548	1280	3828	3774	101.43
NEELB	3048	1780	4828	5145	93.84
SEELB	2938	1450	4388	4715	93.06
SELB	2834	2093	4927	5455	90.32
	14,202	7155	21,357	22,358	95.52

Under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme additional provision has been introduced on a phased basis since the 1998/99 school year. Since that time the overall level of provision has risen from 45% to over 90%. As not every parent wants to avail of a pre-school place for their child this level of provision was considered sufficient to meet demand.

- (ii) The admissions process to pre-school provision in the 20010/11 school year is still ongoing. Education and Library Boards are indicating an unprecedented increase in demand for pre-school places for the forthcoming school year.

Education and Library Boards are now going through the re-allocation of places process for those children who were not placed at the end of the initial process of admissions which was completed on 30 April 2010. It is expected that this process will be completed by the end June 2010. Education and Library Boards will seek to extend the number of places in existing settings, where possible, or admit to the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme new pre-school providers in the voluntary/private sector to address any shortfall.

In the 2009/10 school year the Department secured additional funding to meet demand for extra places. In order to maintain this increased level for the forthcoming school year an additional £300,000 of funding has already been made available to Education and Library Boards.

The Department will continue to liaise with the Education and Library Boards to ensure that, as far as possible, this significantly increased demand for pre-school places is met.

Funding for School Maintenance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding for maintenance at each school in North Down (i) in 2009/10; and (ii) budgeted for 2010/11.

(AQW 6683/10)

Minister of Education: Mionsonraítear sa tábla thíos an caiteachas ar chothabháil áitreamh na scoileanna rialaithe agus ar chothabháil áitreamh na scoileanna atá faoi chothabháil ar an Dún Thuaidh sa bhliain 2009/10. Ní leithdháileann Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt, atá freagrach as cothabháil na scoileanna seo, buiséid ar bhonn scoil ar scoil. Ní féidir, mar sin, buiséid chothabhála a sholáthar le haghaidh scoileanna ar an Dún Thuaidh don bhliain 2010/11.

Spending on the maintenance of controlled and maintained schools' premises in North Down in 2009/10 is detailed in the table below. The South Eastern Education and Library Board, which is responsible for the maintenance of these schools, does not allocate budgets on a school-by-school basis. It is, therefore, not possible to provide 2010/11 maintenance budgets for schools in North Down.

School	Expenditure 2009/10
Ballyholme Primary School	£12,519.96
Ballymagee Primary School	£29,639.44
Ballyvester Primary School	£14,145.96
Bangor Academy And 6th Form College	£2,669.97
Bangor Central Nursery School	£18,960.39
Bangor Central Primary School	£32,043.78
Bloomfield Primary School	£76,760.66
Clandeboy Primary School	£23,466.12
Clifton Special School	£33,050.81
Crawfordsburn Primary School	£45,381.13
Donaghadee Primary School	£32,286.30
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	£75,437.83
Glenlola Collegiate	£27,360.40

School	Expenditure 2009/10
Grange Park Primary School	£5,720.48
Hollywood Nursery School	£5,353.63
Hollywood Primary School	£12,283.23
Kilcooley Primary School	£78,678.79
Kilmaine Primary School	£15,942.66
Lakewood Special School	£0.00
Millisle Primary School	£19,823.54
Priory College	£21,436.08
Rathmore Primary School	£11,497.66
Redburn Primary School	£12,017.72
St Anne's Primary School	£3,418.09
School	Expenditure 2009/10
St Columbanus' College	£67,965.28
St Comgall's Primary School	£33,130.12
St Malachy's Primary School	£8,145.65
St Patrick's Primary School	£48,903.12
Towerview Primary School	£232.92
Trinity Nursery School	£8,435.89

Capital Works

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the remedial capital works planned for 2010/11, in light of the delay in capital works for schools in Hollywood.

(AQW 6684/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt in iúl nach bhfuil aon phleananna i bhfeidhm aige, faoi láthair, le haghaidh oibreacha feabhais caipitil do na scoileanna ar an Choill Naofa atá liostaithe sa chlár um oibreacha caipitil. Is iad na scoileanna seo ná Priory College, Hollywood Primary School, Hollywood Nursery School agus Redburn Primary School.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that, at the present time, it has no plans in place for remedial capital works for the Hollywood schools listed on the capital works programme. These are Priory College, Hollywood Primary School, Hollywood Nursery School and Redburn Primary School.

Braidside Integrated School

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed capital build for Braidside Integrated School.

(AQW 6689/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an chomhalta ar na freagraí a thug mé ar AQW 6540/10 agus AQW 6630/10 a chuir Declan O'Loan agus Mervyn Storey faoi seach síos agus a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 14 Bealtaine 2010.

I refer the member to my answers to AQW 6540/10 and AQW 6630/10 tabled by Declan O'Loan and Mervyn Storey respectively and published in the Official Report 14 May 2010.

Preschool Places

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of surplus preschool places available in the 2010/11 academic year, broken down by preschool and constituency.

(AQW 6705/10)

Minister of Education: Tá socraithe agam go gcuirfean an t-eolas a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Convergence Delivery Plan

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail any direct communication, since March 2010, issued by her Department to education sector staff in relation to the Convergence Delivery Plan.

(AQW 6715/10)

Minister of Education: Scríobh mo Roinn chuig na Cathaoirligh agus chuig na Príomhfheidhmeannaigh ar na naoi eagraíocht neamhrannacha phoiblí maidir leis an Phlean Soláthair Choinbhéirseachta ar 27 Aibreán. Scríobh an Roinn chuig Cathaoirleach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair ar 26 Aibreán agus chuig Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt ar 29 Aibreán fosta.

My Department wrote to Chairpersons and Chief Executives of the nine Non-departmental public bodies about the Convergence Delivery Plan on 27 April. The Department also wrote to the Chairperson of the Western Education and Library Board on 26 April and to the Chief Executive of the North Eastern Education and Library Board on 29 April.

A meeting of a Communicating Change Consultative Group involving officials from the department and the bodies involved in convergence took place on 22 April. The Chief Executive designate of ESA also met with the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards on 30 April.

Teachers' Pensions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education why the pensions of retired teachers have been frozen; and what plans she has to address this issue in the future.

(AQW 6731/10)

Minister of Education: Is í an Roinn Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, ina cáil mar ionadaí na Státseirbhíse ar an Choiste Oifigiúil um Phinsin Ghairme, atá i gceannas ar a leithéid de shaincheisteanna agus tugann sí comhairle gurb í an Státchiste a shocraíonn an ráta.

The Department of Finance and Personnel, in their capacity as the Civil Service representative on the Official Committee on Occupational Pensions, is the lead on any such issues and they advise that the rate is set by the Treasury.

Applied Behaviour Analysis in Treating Autism

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the effectiveness of Applied Behaviour Analysis in treating Autism spectrum disorders; and if she has any plans to extend this programme to specialist schools, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 6750/10)

Minister of Education: Athraíonn riachtanais oideachais speisialta na bpáistí ó pháiste go páiste agus tá riachtanais na bpáistí ar speictream an uathachais go háirithe éagsúil.

The special educational needs of children differ from child to child and the needs of children on the autistic spectrum are particularly diverse.

Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have statutory responsibility for identifying, assessing and meeting the special educational needs of children including those with autism. ELBs do so taking into account the individual needs of each child and, therefore, there will be variations in the provision made, based on the assessed needs of the child. Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is one of many methods of intervention for autism. Currently all ELBs are providing a variety of ABA based programmes, including the provision of classroom assistants trained in ABA.

I am determined that all children with special education needs receive the very best start in life by ensuring that their education provision is tailored to their very different individual needs. Interventions for children with autism, in line with the recommendations of the Report of the Task Group on Autism, should be child-centred. The Task Group Report, launched in 2002, sets out very clear reasons why it would not be appropriate to advocate only one approach to meeting the needs of children with autism.

The Department of Education does not have any plans for specialist schools for ABA. Any proposal for an ABA specialist school would have to be developed in conjunction with the appropriate Education and Library Board (ELB) or indeed all ELBs before approaching DE through the normal development proposal route.

Newbuild Schools in Upper Bann

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education for an update on each proposed new build for schools in the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQW 6808/10)

Minister of Education: Tá seacht n-olltionscadal tógála i dtoghcheantar na Banna Uachtair faoi láthair; tá ceann amháin á thógáil; agus tá sé cinn ag céimeanna éagsúla den phleanáil.

There are currently seven major building projects in the Upper Bann constituency; one under construction and six at various stages of planning.

School name	Project description	Planning stage
Banbridge Academy	Extension & Refurbishment	Project under construction, due to complete Nov. 2011
St Mary's PS, Banbridge	New school on extended site	Stage D revision awaited
St Teresa's PS, Lurgan	New school on extended site	Stage D revision under consideration
Tannaghmore PS	New school on existing site	Stage D revision awaited
Lurgan College	New school on existing site	Project on hold – awaiting strategic plan for Craigavon area from SELB
Portadown College	New school on existing site	Stage C awaited
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	New school on extended site	Stage D under consideration

As you will be aware the review of all proposed major capital work projects, including the six planned projects in your constituency, is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. While I recognise the challenging circumstances, I am not in a position at present to give specific dates for future progress of any particular scheme.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Employment Opportunities in the Comber Area

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had about creating employment opportunities in the Comber area and regenerating the town's businesses. (AQW 6583/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): I have not had any recent specific discussions with stakeholders from within the Comber area in relation to job creation opportunities or in relation to regenerating the town's businesses. However, I have visited a number of businesses within the wider Strangford constituency including LE Pritchett and EDM Spanwall.

Over the last five years, Invest NI has issued 480 offers of assistance to businesses in the Strangford Parliamentary Constituency, which includes the Comber area, which, if fully implemented, will lever total investment of nearly £70 million, leading to the creation of 381 new jobs and safeguarding a further 151 others.

Invest NI assistance has helped ambitious growth plans put forward by companies such as Willowbrook Foods, John Huddleston Engineering and TG Eakin. You will be aware that TG Eakin this year received the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise in International Trade and I hope to be visiting with the company in the near future.

Invest NI's full range of support is available to businesses in the area. It will continue to work proactively with local companies and entrepreneurs to assist any worthwhile eligible business opportunities, as well as helping them to minimise the impact of the economic downturn.

Ferry Operators and Tourism

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she would consider introducing a scheme to help people with the often prohibitive cost of travelling by sea between mainland UK and Northern Ireland to attend game fairs and events, thus benefitting ferry operators and tourism. (AQW 6608/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have no plans for introducing a discount scheme for ferry travellers. However, my Department through the agencies funded by it, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland Limited, work actively with event organisers and ferry operators to ensure that visitors and passengers attending events in Northern Ireland have quality tourism and travel experiences. Indeed a number of the major events, such as the North West 200, work with the tourist agencies and the ferry operators to provide cost effective travel packages for those travelling to their events.

The Consumer Council works with the ferry companies to ensure high standards of service, and has produced 'Plain Sailing' – a helpful passenger's guide to planning and using ferry travel, which includes advice on how to get the best deal when travelling by sea.

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

Planning Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to make the Planning Service financially self-sufficient, with outgoings being equal to the revenue raised. (AQW 6584/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The Department's Planning Service is currently experiencing a budgetary shortfall of just over £8m, mainly due to a significant reduction in planning fee income associated with a reduction in the number of planning applications being received. In light of this much reduced volume of planning applications and reduced income, the Planning Service is seeking to identify cost reduction measures which will help it to align staffing levels and costs more closely with work demands and revenue.

I anticipate that the redeployment of 271 staff from the Planning Service will be necessary to deliver the required scale of cost reductions. Current plans are that the Northern Ireland Civil Service will be able to manage the workforce reductions in the Planning Service through the redeployment of surplus staff either to other suitable posts in the DOE or in another NICS Department.

The Planning Service will reorganise to live within its budget and reprioritise resources to ensure the impact from the reduction in staff is minimised and key services to customers can be maintained.

I will also ensure that the Department makes the appropriate representations to DFP for additional in year funding at the June Monitoring round. You may also wish to note that the Department has initiated a fundamental review of the nature and structure of the fees charged for planning services with the aim of ensuring that the fees charges for specific chargeable services are broadly consistent with the costs of providing those services.

Planning Service Staff

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment what (i) consultation; and (ii) cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken regarding the proposals to relocate Planning Service staff to other parts of the Civil Service.

(AQW 6616/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department's Planning Service is currently experiencing a budgetary shortfall of just over £8m, mainly due to a significant reduction in planning fee income associated with a reduction in the number of planning applications being received. In light of this much reduced volume of planning applications and reduced income, the Planning Service is seeking to identify cost reduction measures which will help it to align staffing levels and costs more closely with work demands and revenue.

A report has been submitted to me on how Planning Service can live within its opening budget allocation which has identified 271 posts now considered surplus in terms of affordability.

I anticipate that the redeployment of 271 staff from Planning Service will be necessary to deliver the required scale of cost reductions. The Planning Service will reorganise to live within its budget and reprioritise resources to ensure key services to customers can be maintained and impact from the reduction in staff is minimised.

The Department is currently engaged in developing a Redeployment Scheme for all staff who will be becoming surplus in the near future. It is also developing a Regrading Scheme to enable Professional & Technical (P&T) planners to transfer voluntarily to the General Service discipline. This would open up the possibility of redeployment to vacancies across the NICS. P&T Planners cannot be required to regrade.

There are a number of stages to be completed including consultation with the Environment Committee, Corporate HR, the TUS, the staff affected, and other Departments who will be importing DOE staff before the formal process of redeploying staff from the Planning Service can commence.

I am confident however, that the Northern Ireland Civil Service should be able to manage the workforce reductions in the Planning Service through the redeployment of surplus staff either to other suitable posts in the DOE or in another NICS Department. While there may be costs associated with the redeployment of staff to new office locations, these costs are borne by the importing Department in line with the standard NICS Handbook provisions. It is not possible at this stage to estimate what

these might be as the Department has no information about the posts its surplus staff may be asked to fill.

I will also ensure that the Department makes the appropriate representations to DFP for additional in year funding at the June Monitoring round. You may also wish to note that the Department has initiated a fundamental review of the nature and structure of the fees charged for planning services with the aim of ensuring that the fees charged for specific chargeable services are broadly consistent with the costs of providing those services.

Planning Service Staff

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the criteria that will be used for selecting the 270 Planning Service staff for possible re-deployment to other positions in the Civil Service.

(AQW 6644/10)

Minister of the Environment: Subject to consultation with the Trades Union, the selection of staff to be redeployed as surplus will be based primarily on business requirements i.e. identifying the individuals most suited to the work functions remaining in the Agency, rather than identifying the individuals whose post is surplus. The personal preferences of staff will be taken into account, where possible. This will include anyone who wishes to volunteer for redeployment.

However if it is not possible to identify the individuals to remain based on business need, names may be selected randomly in a fair and transparent manner.

Planning Service Staff

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the re-deployment of Planning Service staff to other parts of the Civil Service on (i) levels of service for the public; (ii) the size of the case load, per officer, within the Planning Service compared to other UK regions; and (iii) the overall cost of re-deployment, including any subsistence payments.

(AQW 6645/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department is experiencing a financial shortfall of c£16m for 2010-11. The Planning Service element of this shortfall is estimated at £8.3m the bulk of which (£6.4m) relates to a reduction in planning receipts.

The global economic downturn and its impact on the property and housing markets has clearly been a major factor contributing to the sharp fall in planning application numbers and also related fee receipts received by Planning Service. In light of the much reduced volume of planning applications and related fee receipts Planning Service has been considering ways to reduce its operating costs to align staffing levels and costs more closely to work demands and revenue. Significant staff reductions and redeployment of staff is necessary to align staffing levels and costs more closely to work demands and revenue. The Planning Service will therefore reorganise to live within its budget and reprioritise resources to ensure key services to customers can be maintained and impact on the economy from the reduction in staff is minimised.

The current average caseload in the Planning Service during the 2009/10 business year was 180 planning applications for each case officer which is slightly higher than the figure of 150 cases in GB. However, we have no information on the mix of applications in the GB total and so direct comparison may not be appropriate.

The Department is approaching the redeployment of Planning Service staff in line with the standard terms and conditions for dealing with such situations in the NICS. It is too early to estimate the overall costs of this redeployment exercise however, salaries for staff which are redeployed and therefore the cost of redeployment will be borne by the receiving Department.

Planning Service Staff

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment what plans are in place to ensure that Planning Service staff who are re-deployed under the current proposals, have ample opportunity to avail of training to keep their professional skills and registration current, in the event of a future upturn in planning applications.

(AQW 6646/10)

Minister of the Environment: In developing arrangements for the redeployment of specialist planning staff to other duties in the Department and the wider NICS, the Department will seek to incorporate provisions that would enable those staff to be considered for future vacancies in planning.

The Department's officials have already been in discussion with the RTPI and clarified that if a specialist planner is not working in a specialist planning role they can still retain their planning status provided they can demonstrate 50 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) over a 24 month period. It would be the Department's intention, with the co-operation of receiving Departments, to agree that specialist planning staff who are voluntarily re-graded and redeployed are provided with the opportunity to avail of CPD activity or training for 12 months from the date of redeployment.

Planning Service Staff

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the proposed re-deployment of Planning Service staff on the Strategic Projects Unit.

(AQW 6647/10)

Minister of the Environment: In response to your previous written questions I have already outlined the background and financial/economic reasons for the decision to redeploy the 271 planning service staff.

To reiterate, in light of the much reduced volume of planning applications and reduced income, the Planning Service is seeking to identify cost reduction measures which will help it to align staffing levels and costs more closely with work demands and revenue.

The Strategic Projects Unit, in common with all parts of the Planning Service, will have to reorganise to live within its reduced staffing allocation and reprioritise resources to ensure the impact from the reduction in staff is minimised and key services to customers can be maintained.

I will also ensure that the Department makes the appropriate representations to DFP for additional in year funding at the June Monitoring round. You may also wish to note that the Department has initiated a fundamental review of the nature and structure of the fees charged for planning services with the aim of ensuring that the fee charges for specific chargeable services are broadly consistent with the costs of providing those services.

Green Wedge Between Dundonald and Belfast

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQO 1021/10, whether he can confirm that Belfast City Council's submission to the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan supported the protection for the green wedge between Dundonald and Belfast being maintained; and that the Council has not withdrawn from this position. [R]

(AQW 6648/10)

Minister of the Environment: I can confirm that Belfast City Council submitted a detailed formal response to the proposals contained in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) on 25 January 2005. Although the Council does not make a specific reference to the Dundonald Urban Landscape Wedge, they do include support for Landscape Wedges. They also make reference to the Landscape Wedges that were included in the Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) 2001, and highlight the importance of these wedges in defining the limits of settlements. The Dundonald Wedge was one of the wedges included in the BUAP

Belfast City Council also submitted a further response to the BMAP Team on 2 November 2005, in which they counter objected to representations that had been placed on public display in relation to Draft BMAP. In particular they objected to proposals that would remove significant areas from the proposed Urban Landscape Wedge designations at Knock Golf Club.

I can confirm that Belfast City Council has not withdrawn from their position.

Electronic Planning Information for Citizens

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what steps are being taken to ensure that the Electronic Planning Information for Citizens system is compatible with local councils' computer systems.
(AQW 6664/10)

Minister of the Environment: ePIC is a stand alone system based on Oracle, workflow and web based technology. Whilst at the initiation of the project there was no requirement for ePIC to be compatible with IT systems deployed in Local Councils. ePIC has been built to industry standards using mainstream I.T technology and can facilitate information sharing with Council IT systems.

Plans are in place to cost and to take forward a programme of work to ready ePIC for operational service within Local Government structures. In addition a project is underway by Local Government Policy Division to roll out Network NI to local government so that systems such as ePIC can be accessed via council headquarters.

Pension Rights for Councillors

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association to ensure that pension rights for councillors are introduced in this financial year.
(AQW 6679/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have had no discussions with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association about the introduction of pensions for councillors this year.

Runway at Belfast City Airport

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of the Environment when he plans to publish the report compiled by the Civil Aviation Authority regarding the proposed extension of the runway at Belfast City Airport.
(AQW 6696/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Civil Aviation Authority Report is available to the public on request.

Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what consultation took place with the National British Bird and Mule Club or any private clubs in relation to the revision of schedule 4 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
(AQW 6751/10)

Minister of the Environment: The National British Bird and Mule Club and the Mid Ulster British Bird Mule & Hybrid Club were included in the list of consultees to the public consultation exercise on the proposals to review the Wildlife Order. Both organisations responded to the consultation.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Corporation Tax

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to take forward the proposal to reduce corporation tax.

(AQO 1227/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The recent Northern Ireland Economic Reform Group's report on this issue set out a positive case for a reduced rate of corporation tax for Northern Ireland. The new Secretary of State, Owen Patterson, has also indicated that he intends to publish a paper on how responsibility for corporation tax could be transferred to devolved areas.

While I still have some concerns on the public expenditure implications and deliverability of this proposal we will liaise with the new Government on this issue and the Executive sub-group established to consider a new economic strategy for Northern Ireland can consider this issue further.

First Trust Bank

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Finance Minister in Dublin in relation to the Allied Irish Bank proposal to sell off the First Trust Bank.

(AQO 1233/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am very concerned about the potential implications of Allied Irish Banks decision to put First Trust Bank up for sale. It is another indicator of the scale of the difficulties facing local banks and many local jobs are involved. While I cannot become involved in any commercial decisions it is very important that the Northern Ireland banking sector is able to meet the needs of the local economy.

That is why I gave a commitment to raise this issue with Minister Lenihan when I met with the Irish Banking Officials Association on the 27th April.

I was scheduled to meet Minister Lenihan on the 20th May 2010, however, Minister Lenihan can no longer attend this meeting, and Minister Mansergh will be taking his place. I will raise this issue with him then and again with Minister Lenihan when our meeting is rescheduled.

Private Finance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of his current departmental budget, what consideration he has given to private finance and market mechanisms being harnessed to deliver socially desirable outcomes.

(AQO 1234/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Using procurement policy one of our key objectives is to deliver socially desirable outcomes whether publicly or privately financed.

Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy is committed to delivering 'Best Value for Money' which is defined as 'the optimum combination of whole life cost and quality to meet the customer's requirements'. This allows for the inclusion, where appropriate, of social, economic and environmental goals. It is for departments to determine the sustainable and social impact they wish to achieve from their programmes and projects.

In terms of my department's current budget, both capital and resource budgets are severely constrained and it is therefore very difficult to contemplate major investments whether publicly or privately financed.

Government Property

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the current rateable valuation of all Government owned property and the current figure for the utilisation of space available. (AQO 1235/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I can speak only for the property owned and leased by DFP, namely the Government Office Estate. This currently comprises approximately 200 buildings with a total asset value of £300m. The space utilization within the Government Office Estate is approximately 16 square meters per person.

Digital Inclusion

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he is working with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on digital inclusion.

(AQO 1236/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Northern Ireland is well positioned with regard to Digital Inclusion - a Digital Inclusion Unit is based within the Delivery and Innovation Division in DFP. The Digital Inclusion Unit is responsible for Digital Inclusion, and focuses on ensuring that citizens across Northern Ireland are capable of accessing new digital services by establishing, funding and operating a number of digital support projects.

A key part of this involves collaboration and consultation with DETI and other Departments. The DFP and DETI Ministers consulted on a response to the Minister for Digital Inclusion in Westminster on the subject of "Delivering Digital Inclusion – An Action Plan for Consultation". Also, The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, in his capacity as Minister responsible for Digital Britain, recently published the "National Plan for Digital Participation". The responsibility for developing the Plan in Northern Ireland rests with the NI Digital Participation Hub which includes representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors including both DFP and DETI.

DFP officials will continue to work with Minister Foster's DETI officials, were required, to enable the implementation of the action plan and relevant digital inclusion initiatives.

Rates: Early Payment

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many ratepayers have availed of the 4% early payment discount in the current financial year compared to the previous three financial years. (AQO 1237/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: This legal provision allows ratepayers to receive a 4% discount on their domestic rate bill if payment reaches Land & Property Services by a date specified on the rate bill. This is generally around 35 days after the issue of the bill.

In the 2008-2009 rating year, 128,524 rate accounts received the discount; in the 2009-2010 rating year, 124,231 rate accounts received the discount. LPS does not hold this information prior to 2008.

To date in the 2010-2011 rating year, 94,589 rate accounts have received the discount. I should stress that the legal provision regarding discount applies to all domestic rate bills, including those issued during the year as people move house and so on. This year's figure therefore continues to rise on a daily basis.

I am aware of correspondence from a number of Members of behalf of their constituents who have not received the discount because their payments have been received by LPS after the quoted discount date. The law is clear – LPS must receive payment of a rate bill by the discount date stated on the bill. Last year, LPS made the provision very clear on the rate bill, in the leaflet accompanying the bill and in the media. The Agency has done so again this year.

Civil Service: Absenteeism

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress is being made in reducing absenteeism within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

(AQO 1238/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Recent years have seen steady progress in reducing absenteeism across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The reduction from an average figure of 15.5 days sickness absence per employee in 2003/04 to 11.0 days in 2008/09 is encouraging, but more needs to be done.

A comprehensive action plan, building on the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, is in place to address sickness absence across all departments.

I am not yet able to report the final out-turn absence figures for 2009/10. I expect to see headline end-of-year figures for 2009/10 around the end of June 2010 and a substantive annual report on sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service will be published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in September as normal.

I will ensure that this information is made available to the Assembly and to my Ministerial colleagues.

Civil Service: 2009 Pay Award

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the negotiations on the 2009 pay award for non-industrial grades below the Senior Civil Service.

(AQO 1239/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A final offer was made to NIPSA on 28 April and their Executive Committee met the following day and reluctantly recommended acceptance of the offer to their members. NIPSA are now in the process of consulting their members and we should know the outcome of their consultation later this month.

Public Sector Reform

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether reform of the public sector is the best means of dealing with the fiscal deficit and whether cuts without reform pose the biggest danger to maintaining front-line services.

(AQO 1240/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As we are all aware the current level of public sector borrowing in the UK is not sustainable and action will need to be taken in the short and medium term in order to reduce the level of national debt. As a result there will be constraints in public spending until at least 2015-16.

Although this is likely to have implications for the whole of the UK, I will be seeking to make sure that Northern Ireland is not disproportionately targeted. However, there is a need to recognise that local departments will inevitably face savings in the coming years.

In order that the implications of additional savings on the general public in Northern Ireland is minimised, it is essential that departments plan in a strategic manner how to achieve these savings. This may include reform in terms of how individual services are delivered, as well as the overall structure of governance and administration. I will continue to urge Ministers and departments to look beyond the quick fix in terms of simply salami slicing funding for front line services. These seemingly easy approaches to achieving savings will only store up future problems, as we are likely to be faced with a sustained period of public expenditure constraint.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Maxillo-facial Surgery

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the target planned waiting time for maxillo-facial surgery; (ii) the actual waiting time; (iii) the number of patients currently on the planned waiting list; and (iv) the longest and average planned waiting time.

(AQW 6538/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): Admissions for planned surgery are determined by either clinical or social criteria. The appropriate time a patient waits for planned surgery will differ on a case by case basis. This will depend upon individual circumstances such as the patient's clinical condition. Consequently, patients awaiting planned surgery are not managed on a waiting list.

Front line Services

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of money transferred to front-line services as a result of the Review of Public Administration changes in the former Northern Health Board area.

(AQW 6558/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: To date £5.2 m of savings have been made in the NHSCT as a result of RPA and these have all been used to meet the costs of front line services. In addition, while it is not possible to identify from which HSSB area savings have been derived in 2009-10, the Health and Social Care Board, Public Health Agency, Business Services Organisation and the Patient and Client Council have delivered a further £3.87m of RPA savings which have likewise been used to support front line services across Northern Ireland.

Review of Public Administration

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the commissioning of health services at local level, by locally based staff, will continue following the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 6592/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In implementing the reforms under the Review of Public Administration, the Health and Social Care Board remains committed to maintaining a strong presence in all of its local offices in Londonderry, Armagh, Ballymena and Belfast. This is considered particularly important to ensure that the Local Commissioning Groups are able to meet their obligations delegated by the Health and Social Care Board to commission services for the population each covers.

Increased Mileage Claims

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on increased mileage claims due to more staff having to travel to Belfast from County Hall, Ballymena since 1 April 2009.

(AQW 6593/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The additional expenditure incurred as a result of the reimbursement of staff mileage claims from Belfast to County Hall, Ballymena could only be determined at a disproportionate cost.

Staff at County Hall, Ballymena

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent in providing mobile phone technology since 1 April 2009 to enable staff who have relocated to Belfast to communicate with support staff at County Hall, Ballymena.

(AQW 6594/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No additional mobile phone technology has been purchased since 1 April 2009 to enable staff who have relocated to Belfast to communicate with staff at County Hall, Ballymena.

Staff at County Hall, Ballymena

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the additional cost of relocating health posts to Belfast from County Hall, Ballymena.

(AQW 6595/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer provided in AQW 6556/10.

Specialist Multidisciplinary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children, in each Health and Social Care Trust, accessed specialist multi-disciplinary child and adolescent mental health services in 2009, broken down by (i) 0 to 3 years; (ii) 4 to 10 years; and (iii) 11 to 18 years.

(AQW 6605/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Cancer and Diabetes Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he is doing to meet the recommendations on cancer and diabetes services outlined in the Public Accounts Committee's report of February 2010 into the Health Service.

(AQW 6609/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A Memorandum of Reply to the Public Accounts Committee's report, which includes my Department's response to the recommendations on cancer and diabetes services, was laid before the Assembly on 16 April 2010 and is available on the Department of Finance and Personnel's website. It can be accessed at –

<http://www.aasdni.gov.uk/pubs/MORs/8th%20&%209th%20Report%2009%20-10.pdf>

Mother and Baby Clinic in Crumlin

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Northern Health and Social Care Trust intends to take over management of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's , Health Visitor led, Mother and Baby Clinic in Crumlin.

(AQW 6710/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are currently ongoing discussions and negotiations between the South Eastern and Northern Trusts regarding the transfer of responsibility for Health Visiting Services from the South Eastern Trust to the Northern Trust.

A joint meeting will be convened by both Trusts in June 2010 to agree the details of the new arrangement which will include timescales for the transfer of responsibility of these services.

Accident and Emergency Unit in the Causeway Hospital

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the re-organisation of accident and emergency services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, if he can provide an assurance that the Accident and Emergency Unit in the Causeway Hospital will not experience problems similar to those which occurred in the Antrim Area Hospital during the weekend of 15 and 16 May.

(AQW 6758/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised by the Northern Trust that activity at Antrim Area Hospital was higher than normal over the weekend of 15 and 16 May. There will always be occasions at both Antrim Area and Causeway hospitals where activity can be higher than normal and this can cause some delays. However, the Trust has assured me that the necessary measures to safely implement the service changes on 24th May will be in place and that they will be in a position to respond to the anticipated additional workload.

In addition, the consolidation of A&E services across two acute hospitals instead of four will mean that a larger team of doctors and nurses will be available to provide care at the Antrim Area Hospital and the Causeway Hospital A&E Departments.

Maternity Services Provided by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr S Neeson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of maternity services provided by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 6773/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Safe, sustainable maternity services are a key priority for my Department and I was pleased to note, in the recently published report on intrapartum care by the RQIA, that our standard of maternity care continues to strengthen and improve in spite of all the pressures that Trusts are currently facing.

I commend the commitment and dedication of staff working to provide safe and effective maternity services for women and their babies. In particular, staff have responded constructively to both regional and national serious incidents in maternity services, and have worked hard to implement the lessons learned from these incidents.

You will be aware that I recently announced a comprehensive review of maternity services, which will provide a strategy for the delivery of high quality, safe, sustainable and accessible maternity services in Northern Ireland.

Community Mental Health Services

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the proposed changes to community mental health services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area are compatible with the proposals of the Bamford report.

(AQW 6774/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust advises that the main focus of current developments in mental health services is to expand community based alternatives to inpatient services in line with Bamford recommendations.

Considerable progress has been made in; providing community based services for people with Dementia; Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Services introducing more equitable service provision across the whole Trust area for people with severe and enduring mental illness; further developing the rehabilitation and recovery services within the hospital and community and working with partners in the voluntary sector to maximise opportunities in supported living.

Accident and Emergency Services in the Antrim Area Hospital

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional resources he plans to allocate to the accident and emergency services in the Antrim Area Hospital to ensure that services can be safely transferred from the Whiteabbey Hospital and the Mid-Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 6775/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Trust has assured me that the necessary measures to safely implement these changes will be in place for 24th May and that Antrim Area Hospital will be in a position to respond to the anticipated additional workload.

The consolidation of A&E services across two acute hospitals instead of four will mean that a larger team of doctors and nurses will be available to provide care at the Antrim Area Hospital A&E. Additional physical space will be provided within the emergency department at Antrim Area Hospital and an additional 20 beds are being provided.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service will also be increasing ambulance cover in the Northern Trust area to support these changes to service delivery.

Altnagelvin Hospital

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the capacity at which the new south wing of Altnagelvin Hospital is currently operating; and what clinical services are being provided.

(AQW 6817/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the south wing of Altnagelvin Hospital provides the following clinical services, haematology/oncology, chemotherapy, maternity, neonatal intensive care, acute care of older people and rehabilitation.

Phase 3.2b of the south wing development was completed and handed over to the Trust on 19 February. The Trust and the Health and Social Care Board are working closely to finalise the funding required to support the services associated with this development with a view to ensuring that the new accommodation becomes operational as soon as possible. When opened, the facility will provide a coronary care unit, acute medical unit and a stroke unit.

Parkinson's Disease

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many full-time and part-time consultants specialising in Parkinson's work for the Health Service.

(AQO 1245/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A range of consultant staff across the health service will have an interest in the care of patients with Parkinson's disease. These may include those specialising in diseases of the elderly or working in our neurology departments. There are currently 17 consultant neurologists in Northern Ireland 9 of whom have a special interest in Parkinson's.

The majority of people living with Parkinson's disease will however have their care managed by their general practitioner who will have access to specialist advice when necessary. Other support services are of course important to Parkinson's sufferers and their carers including the input of specialist nurses and allied health professionals.

Spending Plan 2010-11

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he plans to produce his departmental spending plan for 2010/11.

(AQO 1246/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I will share my revenue spending plans with the Health Committee on 25 May and my capital spending plans on 20 May. This will, of course, be potentially subject to further amendment arising from the change in the UK government.

Inpatients

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average duration of an in-patient stay in hospital.

(AQO 1249/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest validated figures held by my Department relate to the 2008/09 year. Over all programmes of care, the average length of stay in hospital was 6.2 days.

Budget 2010-11

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assessment of the adequacy of his current departmental budget.

(AQO 1250/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My CSR plan focussed on changes which would deliver upstream prevention and downstream management of conditions and which would have ensured we could still have an HSC in twenty years time. Now I am tasked with delivering £105m of revenue and £21.5m of capital cuts, my efforts to build in insurance for the future will inevitably be impaired.

I will continue to highlight to the Executive that short term cuts will debilitate the HSC for many years to come. I will endeavour to protect the front line, but the health service is bearing the burden of £700m efficiencies, added demographic pressures, and increased demand for hospital services. Furthermore I have no choice but to comply with a UK level 3 year settlement for Agenda For Change staff – 90% of staff - which includes a cost of living increase of 2.5%, much higher than general inflation.

I will share my spending plans with the Health Committee on 27 May. This will, of course, be potentially subject to further changes arising from a change in the UK party or parties of government.

Budget 2010-11

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assessment of the impact of the cuts in his departmental budget in 2010/11.

(AQO 1252/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My CSR plan focussed on changes which would deliver upstream prevention and downstream management of conditions and which would have ensured we could still have an HSC in twenty years time. Now I am tasked with delivering £105m of revenue and £21.5m of capital cuts, my efforts to build in insurance for the future will inevitably be impaired.

I will continue to highlight to the Executive that short term cuts will debilitate the HSC for many years to come. I will endeavour to protect the front line, but the health service is bearing the burden of £700m efficiencies, added demographic pressures, and increased demand for hospital services. Furthermore I have no choice but to comply with a UK level 3 year settlement for Agenda For Change staff – 90% of staff - which includes a cost of living increase of 2.5%, much higher than general inflation.

I will share my spending plans with the Health Committee on 27 May. This will, of course, be potentially subject to further changes arising from a change in the UK party or parties of government.

Causeway Hospital: Renal Unit

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the development of the new renal unit for the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQO 1253/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern HSC Trust has been asked to develop a business case for a new renal unit at Causeway Hospital. A key element of this process is to determine the availability of funding to support the scheme. Until the business case has been submitted and assessed by my officials I cannot give a commitment to any project in the planning stage.

In addition, given the current financial climate and uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the next CSR, I must look at all projects and be certain of availability of funding before any project can progress.

Tobacco Products

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking on the sale of tobacco products.

(AQO 1254/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In addition to increasing the age of sale for tobacco products to 18 years from 1 September 2008, I recently consulted on proposals for tougher sanctions on retailers who continue to flout the law on underage tobacco sales. I have also brought a paper to the Executive seeking approval for public consultation on draft regulations banning the display of tobacco products in retail premises and the sale of tobacco from vending machines.

In addition, I will continue to inform the public about the dangers of smoking, and further develop smoking cessation services with the aim of reducing smoking and tobacco sales in Northern Ireland.

Department of Justice

Breaches of Licensing Laws

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many licensees have been (i) charged with; and (ii) convicted of, breaches of licensing laws in each year since 2007.

(AQW 6424/10)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): Liquor licensing is the responsibility of the Department for Social Development and the charging of licensees for breaches of licensing laws is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. Information on the number charged/reported to the Public Prosecution Service has been sought from the Police Service of Northern Ireland and is given in Table 1. Data are for the calendar years 2007 to 2009 and cover both breach of licensing offences which refer to the licensee in the offence definition and other breach offences, which do not identify the licensee specifically.

Table 2 gives the number of convictions for both for the calendar years 2004 to 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

It is not possible to reconcile PSNI data directly with conviction data as PSNI denote the offence as it has been initially recorded and this may differ from the offence for which a suspect (or suspects) is subsequently proceeded against.

TABLE 1: NUMBER CHARGED/REPORTED TO THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE FOR BREACH OF LICENSING LAWS¹ 2007-2009

Year	Licensee offences	Other breach of licensing offences ²	Total
2007	4	56	60
2008	17	92	109
2009	17	188	205

Source:

The statistics given in the table are derived from data supplied by PSNI. Figures are collated on the following basis: (i) if a person is charged more than once on separate occasions in the given year or charged for offences committed on separate occasions, a separate charge is included for each and (ii) if a person is charged for both licensee and other breach offences at the same time, they are included in the licensee offences.

TABLE 2: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR BREACH OF LICENSING LAWS¹ 2004-2006

Year	Licensee offences	Other breach of licensing offences ²	Total
2004	2	67	69
2005	0	44	44
2006	0	55	55

Source: Department of Justice

Notes:

- 1 Excludes offences relating to the purchase, delivery and consumption of alcohol which, by their definition, identify another party as the offender and not the licensee.
- 2 It is not possible to determine if it was the licensee charged/reported and convicted or if the offence was committed by another party.

Police Federation

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what contact he has had with the Police Federation; and how he plans to address concerns it has regarding the need for additional resourcing for the PSNI.

(AQW 6598/10)

Minister of Justice: I met with Terry Spence of the Police Federation on Monday 26 April to discuss the current security situation and the resources available to the Chief Constable. Further to that meeting Mr Spence wrote to me, copied to all Executive Ministers, requesting that the Executive and I collectively address the security threat. I have since written to Mr Spence expressing the Executive's condemnation of the actions of Dissident groups and our unanimous support for the PSNI in the work it is doing to create a safer and more normal policing environment.

The Treasury has made available to the PSNI an additional £37.4m in 2010/11 specifically to deal with dissident terrorist activity and where there is a clear case for further resource I will discuss that with the Minister for Finance and Personnel in the first instance.

Dissident Terrorist Activity

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what steps has taken to ensure that the PSNI has sufficient resources to deal with dissident terrorist activity.

(AQW 6600/10)

Minister of Justice: I have met the Chief Constable and discussed the PSNI's resource requirements in light of the security situation. The PSNI has been given a commitment that an additional £37.4m will be provided in 2010/11 specifically to deal with dissident terrorist activity. Where there is a clear case for further resource I will discuss the matter with the Minister for Finance and Personnel in the first instance.

Convicted Sex Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convicted sex offenders are currently living in each council area.

(AQW 6618/10)

Minister of Justice: The recording of information about the whereabouts of sexual offenders only applies to those who are currently subject to the notification requirements of Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (the 'sex offender register'). This information is a matter for the Chief Constable who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Children and Young People on Bail

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice how many children and young people currently on bail have an address in north Belfast.

(AQW 6621/10)

Minister of Justice: Bail can be granted by either the courts or the police.

Court Bail

There are currently 114 young persons¹ who are on bail granted by the courts and who have an address in Belfast North constituency

Police Bail

There are currently 452 young persons currently on police bail with an address in north Belfast.

Notes:

Both sets of figures are drawn from live databases and the numbers may change daily.

1. A young person is defined as a person aged between 10 and under 18 years of age.
2. Figures provided by PSNI Command Secretariat and cover North Belfast Area Command.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the success of Antisocial Behaviour Orders and their impact on reducing antisocial behaviour.

(AQW 6639/10)

Minister of Justice: The 2008 report by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate into the operation and effectiveness of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) stated that there has been a sensible approach to the introduction of ASBOs in Northern Ireland. It also noted that ASBOs have a role to play in tackling antisocial behaviour but do not provide the full answer. They are used as part of a staged approach to tackling antisocial behaviour alongside other tools.

Dealing with this issue is not solely the responsibility of any one agency, it requires a partnership approach and my Department supports PSNI, district councils and Housing Executive in their actions to tackle antisocial behaviour. They are using the full range of tools available to them including verbal or written warnings, mediation, diversionary activities, acceptable behaviour contracts, injunctions, ASBOs, criminal prosecutions, and evictions.

My Department remains committed to tackling antisocial behaviour, and to deliver a 15% reduction in antisocial behaviour incidents by next March. We are currently on target to achieve this and tackling antisocial behaviour will continue to be a priority in any future plans on Community Safety.

Domestic Abuse

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the 24,482 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the PSNI in 2009/10, how many of these cases occurred in each policing district; and how many were regarded as serious.

(AQW 6670/10)

Minister of Justice: The recording of incidents of domestic abuse by the PSNI is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Annual Crime Figures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the annual crime figures released today by the Chief Constable, to provide a breakdown of the nature and number of crimes recorded in each Policing District for 2009/10.

(AQW 6671/10)

Minister of Justice: The recording of annual crime figures is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Unsolved Murders

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Justice how many murders have gone unsolved in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6677/10)

Minister of Justice: The investigation of murders and the collection of statistical data in respect of crime are matters for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Clearance Rates for Burglary, Rape and Assault

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Justice to detail the clearance rates for (i) burglary; (ii) rape; and (iii) assault in each policing district for each of the last three years.

(AQW 6678/10)

Minister of Justice: The collection of data in respect of clearance rates is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Offensive Weapons

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions secured for (i) being armed with an offensive weapon with intent to commit offence; (ii) possessing an article with a blade or point in a public place; and (iii) possessing an article with a blade or point on school premises, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6693/10)

Minister of Justice: The table gives the number of convictions for each of the offences requested. Convictions for other offensive weapon offences are also included for information.

Data cover the calendar years 2002 to 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available) and are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

NUMBER CONVICTED FOR OFFENSIVE WEAPON OFFENCES BY OFFENCE 2002-2006

Offence	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Armed with offensive weapon with intent to commit offence	0	2	2	1	3
Possessing article with blade or point in public place	17	15	10	20	24
Possessing article with blade or point on school premises	0	1	1	0	3
Possessing offensive weapon in public place	143	161	166	188	211
Possessing offensive weapon on school premises	0	0	2	0	1
Total	160	179	181	209	242

Alleged Victims of Sexual Assault

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, with particular reference to children and vulnerable adults, what measures are in place to protect the alleged victims of sexual assault after suspects have been charged and while their cases proceed through the court system; and whether these measures apply to both adult and juvenile suspects

(AQW 6701/10)

Minister of Justice: There are a number of ways in which the justice system seeks to provide such protection.

When an individual has been charged with committing a serious offence, including a sexual offence, the court may remand that person into custody, or place specific restrictions on them as part of the conditions of bail. There are also other legal remedies available (such as non-molestation orders) for those requiring protection from an abusive partner or who may be subjected to intimidation.

Risks to the public from a person within the criminal justice process who is suspected of a serious sexual or violent offence may be assessed and managed by the criminal justice agencies working together through multi agency public protection arrangements. Risks posed by young people under 18 are normally managed under social services child protection arrangements, but can be considered on a multi agency basis if necessary.

Once the case comes to court there are a range of statutory special measures available for victims of sexual assault to help them give their best possible evidence. This may include a facility to give evidence in private. All children under the age of 17, regardless of the nature of the offence to which the proceedings relate, are considered to be vulnerable witnesses and are automatically eligible for special measures.

Adult complainants of sexual offences are eligible for special measures on the grounds that the quality of their evidence is likely to be diminished because of fear or distress about testifying. In addition, such witnesses are automatically eligible to give evidence by live link.

The law also provides that a person charged with a sexual offence cannot cross-examine the complainant or a child witness in person.

Recorded Incidents of Violence

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of recorded incidents of (i) domestic violence; (ii) sexual assault; (iii) actual bodily harm; and (iv) grievous bodily harm, recorded in the East Antrim constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6703/10)

Minister of Justice: The recording of incidents of (i) domestic violence; (ii) sexual assault; (iii) actual bodily harm; and (iv) grievous bodily harm is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board, and I have forwarded this Question to the Chief Constable, who will respond directly.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6210/10, how the six breaches of Anti-social Behaviour Orders were dealt with by the courts.

(AQW 6709/10)

Minister of Justice: I have been informed that four of the six ASBO breaches referred to in AQW/6534/10 (and pursuant to AQW/6210/10) were dealt with by the courts. Two received a Custodial Sentences (1 suspended), one received a Youth Conference Order and one received a Probation Order. The PPS has not yet decided how to proceed with one of the ASBO breaches and has decided not to prosecute in another case.

Department for Regional Development

Traffic Wardens

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the working hours of traffic wardens on duty in Belfast; (ii) what consideration has been given to extending the evening hours worked by traffic wardens to ensure that clearways, particularly on arterial routes are clear for a sufficient period of time to allow rush-hour traffic to pass.

(AQW 6601/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that the standard deployment hours for Traffic Attendants in Belfast are 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Monday to Saturday and 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm on Sundays. Additional deployment of Traffic Attendants is routinely provided in Belfast city centre to 10:30 pm.

Clearway restrictions in Belfast apply from 8:00 am to 9:30 am and from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm, Monday to Friday, which are within the standard deployment hours for Traffic Attendants.

Pothole Repair Work in North Antrim

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a timetable for pothole repair work in North Antrim, broken down by council area.

(AQW 6638/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the roads in North Antrim, like so many other roads across the North, were badly affected by the very cold weather experienced over the winter months. The repeated freezing and thawing cycle has had a damaging effect on the road network, causing the carriageway to split and potholes to form.

In January of this year the Executive allocated an additional £15 million, approximately, to Roads Service. This funding was used by Roads Service, to address the worst of the roads and also deal with the effects of the cold spell.

In the North Antrim constituency, which includes the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Council areas, Roads Service has now resumed operation of its normal inspection and repair system under the Maintenance Standards for Safety. Under these safety standards and procedures, there are established frequencies for road inspections, which are dependent on traffic volumes. It also specifies the response times for the repair of defects. The inspection frequencies vary between daily cycles to four

monthly cycles depending on road type, while response times for defect repairs depend on the severity of the defect and range from one calendar day, to inclusion in the next work programme.

Surface defects which are identified outside of these inspection regimes, for example, those reported by members of the public, or as a result of ad-hoc inspections, are also dealt with according to the afore-mentioned standards and remedial work arranged as necessary.

As the repair time is dependent on the severity of the defect, and road inspections are undertaken on a daily basis, Roads Service's timetables for the repair of carriageway defects are constantly being reviewed and re-prioritised. For this reason, Roads Service is unable to provide a definitive timetable for pothole repair work in North Antrim.

Roads Service will continue to undertake regular inspections and condition surveys, to ensure that the road network does not fall below satisfactory and serviceable levels.

Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Service

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the change in passenger numbers on the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6659/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information which details the changes in passenger numbers travelling on all or part of the line from Coleraine to Derry.

2007/08	264,934
2008/09	279,904
2009/10	276,157

Note: These statistics relate to ticket types reported on Merit but exclude Commuter Travelcards and School Passes.

The average number of those travelling in the 3 years quoted, represents a 75% increase on the equivalent figure for 2003/2004.

Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Service

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reliability of the Coleraine to Londonderry railway service's departure and arrival times in the last 12 months.

(AQW 6660/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information about the punctuality of the Coleraine to Derry railway service's arrival times in the last 12 months as well as the reliability of the service. The Passengers Charter defines punctuality and reliability.

Month	Punctuality (percentage of trains arriving no more than 10 minutes late)	Reliability (percentage of trains running as planned)
April 09	99.24	100.00
May 09	98.51	99.55
June 09	97.29	99.88
July 09	97.79	99.41
Aug. 09	98.97	100.00
Sept. 09	98.82	100.00
Oct. 09	94.56	100.00

Month	Punctuality (percentage of trains arriving no more than 10 minutes late)	Reliability (percentage of trains running as planned)
Nov. 09	95.59	100.00
Dec. 09	94.97	99.87
Jan. 09	96.12	100.00
Feb. 09	97.34	99.70
March 09	98.44	100.00
Average	97.34	99.87

The Translink Passenger's Charter sets a punctuality target of 90% of trains on the Derry line arriving no more than 10 minutes late. This target was achieved in every month on this section of the line.

In line with the Passenger's Charter, the above information excludes services which are late due to reasons outside the control of NI Railways, for example extreme weather conditions.

Translink have indicated that NI Railways measures the arrival times of all services at their destination and not at their departure point. However, if a train arrives at its destination on time, that is normally a good indication that its departure and intermediate stations are reasonably close to being on time.

The Translink Passenger's Charter sets a reliability target of 99.2% of trains on the Derry line to run as planned. This target was achieved in every month on this section of the line.

A2 Dualling of the Maydown to Londonderry Airport

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development when the A2 dualling of the Maydown to Londonderry Airport will be completed.

(AQW 6661/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the works on the A2 dualling scheme, from Maydown to City of Derry Airport, are progressing to programme and should be substantially complete in November 2010.

Roads Service Repair Schemes

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what Roads Service repair schemes are planned for (i) the Antrim Borough Council area; and (ii) the Newtownabbey Borough Council area over the next three years; and to provide a timetable for these repairs.

(AQW 6665/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Structural Maintenance allocations for this financial year are currently being finalised. However, proposed schemes for the Antrim Borough Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, for this financial year, are contained in the Reports to Councils and can be accessed from Roads Service's internet site at:-

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

As the Structural Maintenance allocations for the following two years are not available, at present, Roads Service is unable to provide details of repair schemes beyond the current financial year.

Pedestrian Crossing at the Point crossroads, Laurencetown

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development when work will commence on a pedestrian crossing at the Point crossroads, Laurencetown, Banbridge.

(AQW 6666/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that an initial traffic survey at Banbridge Road, Laurencetown, was carried out on 23 January 2008. The results of that survey indicated that a further detailed investigation would be merited. However, there are currently higher priority pedestrian crossing schemes to be progressed in the Banbridge Council area. These schemes are likely to be completed before the pedestrian crossing on the Banbridge Road, Laurencetown, but the latter will be included in future programmes of work.

I should advise that completion of all proposed pedestrian crossings is subject to a suitable location being found, the need for additional supporting infrastructure, consultation with affected shopkeepers/householders and sufficient finance being available.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how the Roads Service liaises with the Taxi Enforcement Team to address public hire taxi drivers ranking illegally in Belfast city centre; and for his assessment of the co-operation and consistency of approach between the two bodies to reduce this problem.

(AQW 6667/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it liaises closely with the Driver Vehicle Agency's (DVA) Taxi Enforcement Branch and the PSNI, in relation to the enforcement of taxi rank locations in Belfast. Each enforcement body has its own area of responsibility for enforcement under current legislation, and Roads Service is responsible for the enforcement of parking restrictions.

NSL Services Group (NSL) is the private company contracted by Roads Service to provide parking enforcement and car park management services. NSL has participated in a number of joint operations with DVA and the Police at Donegall Square North. However, these types of operations are resource intensive and have a limited, short term impact, on the illegal parking of taxis.

Parking enforcement against taxis can be difficult, as the drivers are often in their vehicle or nearby, and when approached by a Traffic Attendant, they drive away before a Penalty Charge Notice can be issued.

Roads Service will continue to work with the other enforcement agencies to develop areas of mutual interest, in relation to parking enforcement. This co-operative approach includes Roads Service's attendance at the Belfast City Centre Management, Taxi Forum, which includes all enforcement agencies and representatives from the public hire taxis associations. The forum is used by all parties to discuss ongoing issues in relation to the public hire taxi operation in Belfast, including illegal parking by taxis.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail any action taken by the Roads Service against public hire taxi drivers who have been ranking illegally in Belfast, in particular at (a) Donegall Square North; (b) Victoria Square at Victoria Street; (c) Glengall Street; and (d) Central Station; and (ii) whether health and safety assessments and risk assessments have been carried out at these locations.

(AQW 6669/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is aware of the problems caused by taxi-drivers parking illegally in the vicinity of the taxi-ranks at Donegall Square North, Victoria Street at Victoria Square, Glengall Street and in the bus-lane outside Central Station.

NSL Services Group (NSL) is the private company contracted by Roads Service to provide parking enforcement and car park management services. NSL carries out regular enforcement at these locations during their routine daily patrols, and additional resources are often deployed at these locations in an effort to address the ongoing parking contraventions.

Roads Service officials have advised that to date this year, NSL's Traffic Attendants have moved on in excess of 1000 vehicles at these locations. These have been mainly taxis, parked in contravention of restrictions. However, only a small number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) have been issued against taxis, as the drivers are often in their vehicle, or nearby, and when approached by a Traffic Attendant, they drive away before a Penalty Charge Notice can be issued.

In relation to health and safety, Roads Service takes all road safety issues into account when considering the provision of new public hire taxi-ranks.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development when tenders will be invited for the provision of the Door-to-Door service; and if the current service provider is not successful in retaining the contract, whether existing staff will be transferred to the new provider where possible.

(AQW 6680/10)

Minister for Regional Development: This matter is currently subject to legal proceedings and I regret that I am unable to provide a detailed response in relation to the points raised. I can say, however, that I am fully committed to the Door-to-Door scheme and that the Department will ensure that the staff currently providing services will receive the protection afforded to them by legislation.

Residents' Parking Scheme in the Lower Malone and Lower Lisburn Road Areas

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the potential implementation of the residents parking scheme in the Lower Malone and Lower Lisburn Road areas.

(AQW 6697/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has recently held discussions with the local residents' association regarding the implementation of a Residents' Parking Scheme in Malone Avenue, Eglantine Avenue, Wellington Park, Wellesley Avenue and linking streets.

Although there has been some slippage in the original draft programme for the development of a scheme in this area, I can confirm that consultants have now been engaged to develop an initial scheme outline for further consultation. It is hoped that the initial scheme outline will be available by the end of June 2010.

Larne to Belfast Railway Service

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reliability of the Larne to Belfast railway service's departure and arrival times in each of the last 24 months.

(AQW 6712/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information about the punctuality of the Larne to Belfast railway service's arrival times in the last 24 months and the reliability of the service.

Month	Punctuality (percentage of trains arriving no more than 5 minutes late)	Reliability (percentage of trains running as planned)
April 08	96.83	99.50
May 08	95.41	99.10
June 08	96.98	99.88
July 08	96.73	99.70
Aug 08	96.33	99.71

Month	Punctuality (percentage of trains arriving no more than 5 minutes late)	Reliability (percentage of trains running as planned)
Sept 08	96.53	99.88
Oct 08	93.33	99.50
Nov 08	92.11	99.33
Dec 08	91.79	98.76
Jan 09	96.83	99.18
Feb 09	95.89	99.56
March 09	96.74	99.42
April 09	98.14	99.94
May 09	96.86	99.55
June 09	97.91	99.78
July 09	96.72	99.22
Aug 09	97.44	99.78
Sept 09	97.33	99.60
Oct 09	91.61*	99.83
Nov 09	87.39*	99.11
Dec 09	92.09*	99.87
Jan 10	96.73	99.94
Feb 10	94.94	99.70
March 10	97.00	99.42
Average	95.47	99.47

* Autumn leaf fall and prevailing weather conditions caused low adhesion and reduced performance and this also contributed to lower performances in October and December 2009.

The Translink Passenger's Charter sets a punctuality target of 95% of trains on the Larne line arriving no more than 10 minutes late. This target was achieved on average over the 24 month analysis.

The Translink Passenger's Charter sets a reliability target of 99.2% of trains on the Larne line to run as planned. This target was achieved on average over the 24 month analysis.

In line with the Passenger's Charter, the above information excludes services which are late due to reasons outside the control of NI Railways, for example extreme weather conditions.

Translink have indicated that NI Railways measures the arrival times of all services at their destination and not at their departure point. However, if a train arrives at its destination on time, that is normally a good indication that its departure and intermediate stations are reasonably close to being on time.

Maintenance and Improvement of the Minor Roads Network

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was spent on maintenance and improvement of the minor roads network in (i) the Larne Borough Council area; (ii) the Carrickfergus Borough Council area; and (iii) the Newtownabbey Borough Council area, in each of the last three years. **(AQW 6713/10)**

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain specific details of its expenditure on the minor roads network. However, it does maintain details of actual total expenditure on Operation and Maintenance activities and Capital works during the preceding financial year in each Council area.

Roads Service total expenditure on operation and maintenance, includes Structural Maintenance, Routine Maintenance, Traffic Maintenance, Winter Maintenance, Street Lighting Maintenance, and Car Parking Maintenance.

Its total expenditure on Capital works includes spend on Major Capital Schemes, Minor Capital Schemes, Street Lighting Renewal and Other Capital activities. The figures provided in the following table refer to Minor Capital Schemes, as these works would predominately be on the minor road network.

The following table also includes details of expenditure on Operation and Maintenance in the Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Council areas, during the last three years.

District Council	Operation and Maintenance Expenditure			Minor Capital Scheme Expenditure		
	06-07	07-08	08-09	06-07	07-08	08-09
Larne	£2,754,000	£2,546,000	£2,238,000	£124,000	£806,000	£810,000
Carrickfergus	£1,764,000	£1,971,000	£1,642,000	£898,000	£54,000	£248,000
Newtownabbey	£3,189,000	£4,576,000	£3,388,000	£710,000	£354,000	£492,000
Totals	£7,707,000	£9,093,000	£7,268,000	£1,732,000	£1,214,000	£1,550,000

Road Repairs

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department spent on road repairs in (i) the West Belfast constituency; and (ii) the Strangford constituency, in each of the last three years. **(AQW 6730/10)**

Minister for Regional Development: As indicated in my answer to the Member's recent question AQW 6448/10, my Department's Roads Service does not hold the information you request on a parliamentary constituency basis.

Roads Service does, however, hold details of its operation and maintenance spend by council area. The table below details the amounts spent in the relevant council areas during the last three years. It is important to note that not all of the areas covered by these councils fall entirely within the boundaries of the West Belfast and Strangford constituencies.

District Council	Operation and Maintenance Spend		
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Belfast	£13,730,000	£16,990,000	£13,976,000
Lisburn	£5,695,000	£4,948,000	£7,704,000
Castlereagh	£3,029,000	£3,552,000	£3,429,000

District Council	Operation and Maintenance Spend		
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Ards	£3,468,000	£5,014,000	£3,394,000
Down	£4,503,000	£4,262,000	£5,813,000

Damage to Vehicles as a Result of Potholes

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the number of claims received for damage to vehicles as a result of potholes in each of the last 6 months; (ii) the number of unsuccessful claims; and (iii) the amount paid out in successful claims and the reasons given in each successful case.

(AQW 6798/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The information on my Department's Central Claims Unit pothole vehicle damage claims work and output is set out in the table below. The figures for unsuccessful claims notifications and successful claims settled include claims received before December 2009. Reasons are not normally provided where claims are settled because Central Claims Unit has objectively assessed the evidence and determined Roads Service to have no defence. Explanations are provided to unsuccessful claimants why their claims have not been successful.

VEHICLE DAMAGE – POTHOLE CLAIM DETAILS

MONTH	New Claims Received	Unsuccessful Claims Notifications	Successful Claims Settled	Compensation Paid £
December 09	103	31	46	9,127.21
January 2010	169	33	49	9,220.31
February 2010	498	36	79	12,223.79
March 2010	492	49	103	14,517.05
April 2010	286	72	250	32,470.75
May 2010	77	40	116	16,846.05
TOTAL	1,625	261	643	94,405.16

Metro and Ulsterbus Fleet

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the average age of buses in the Metro and Ulsterbus fleet; and (ii) how many (a) buses more than 18 years old; and (b) Goldline coaches more than 12 years old were in service in March 2010.

(AQW 6844/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The average age of buses in the Metro bus fleet was 6.8 years with no buses more than 18 years old in service in March 2010.

The average age of buses in the Ulsterbus fleet was 6.4 years old with 37 buses more than 18 years old and 4 Goldline coaches more than 12 years old in service in March 2010.

New Trains Purchased Under Objective 3 of Public Service Agreement 13

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development how many new trains have been purchased under objective 3 of Public Service Agreement 13 of the Programme for Government.
(AQW 6845/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The contract to purchase 20 new trains has been signed and the PSA Objective 3 'To Support Translink to procure 20 additional new trains with the first trains being introduced to service in 2011' is on track to be achieved. Translink have advised that the first train is scheduled to be in passenger service in the latter half of 2011 with all units in passenger service by mid-2012.

A8 Dual Carriageway

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A8 major road scheme from Larne to Belfast.
(AQO 1260/10)

Minister for Regional Development: On 5 August 2009, I announced the selection of the Preferred Route for the 14 kilometre section of the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageway, between Coleman's Corner roundabout and Ballyrickard Road.

During January 2010, Roads Service appointed a contractor to contribute to the development of the Preferred Route design and in due course to construct the scheme. This allows the project team the opportunity to consider construction issues at an early stage of the project.

A second series of one to one meetings, between the designers and those landowners directly affected by the scheme, has just been completed. Another round of these meetings will take place in the coming months to consider detailed access arrangements and accommodation works.

An emerging specimen design exhibition will be held in August or September 2010. Following this, I anticipate that the necessary Draft Statutory Orders and Environmental Statement will be published by early 2011, and it is anticipated that a Public Inquiry will take place later that year.

Road Maintenance

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been allocated to road maintenance in each divisional area, for the current financial year.
(AQO 1262/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that allocations to its Divisions have yet to be finalised for the current financial year. However, I can confirm that, based on the provisional budget figures, the initial Structural Maintenance allocations per Division are likely to be:

Northern Division	£14,000,000
Southern Division	£18,000,000
Eastern Division	£15,000,000
Western Division	£19,000,000

It is not anticipated that final allocations will vary considerably from these figures.

In distributing the resources available for road maintenance, allocations are made to the four Roads Service Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity, that is, resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning allocations across Council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds across the whole of the North.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the timescale for the preparation of an environmental assessment of the A5 Western Transport Corridor; and when it is expected to be published.

(AQO 1263/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the environmental assessment for the proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor is currently ongoing, and will be published as the Environmental Statement this autumn.

Details of all environmental issues and proposed mitigation measures will be included in the Statement, which I anticipate will be the subject of a public inquiry in 2011.

Road Surfaces

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures or checks are in place to ensure that road surfaces are reinstated to the required standard after utility road openings.

(AQO 1265/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it carries out a programme of random sample based inspections to ensure that road surfaces have been reinstated to the required standards. For example, all major works undertaken by utility companies are inspected, 10% of road openings by utility companies are inspected while work is in progress, 10% are inspected in the period up to six months after permanent reinstatement, and a further 10% of openings are inspected in the three-month period preceding the end of the two-year warranty period. Additional inspections are also carried out during routine road condition inspections and in response to third party reports of road defects. Roads Service also takes random core samples from a smaller number of completed reinstatements, to ensure that they meet the required standards in terms of depth, the number of layers and the type of material used.

Where a utility company fails to reinstate a road opening to the specified standard, Roads Service has powers to require the utility company to carry out remedial works, and to inspect those remedial works while in progress and on completion, at the utility company's expense.

In addition, where more than 10% of a utility company's reinstatements are found, through sample inspections, to be defective, current procedures allow Roads Service to require that utility to prepare and implement an agreed improvement plan. Roads Service has advised that there were two improvement plans implemented in each of the last three years.

Ultimately, the Street Works (NI) Order 1995 includes provision for prosecution of a utility company, which may lead to a fine not exceeding level five on the standard scale (£5,000). My Department has reserved this sanction for cases where public safety has been compromised. Two prosecutions were taken in 2006/07 on offences including failure to reinstate to the specified standards, and two further prosecutions were taken in 2008/09.

A26 Dual Carriageway

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the dualling of the A26.

(AQO 1266/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is progressing plans for the provision of a seven kilometre stretch of dual carriageway on the A26, between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road. This is one of the major projects included in the ten year Investment Delivery Plan for Roads.

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, which is scheduled to occur in mid 2011.

It is anticipated that construction work will commence in the latter part of the Investment Delivery Plan (2008-2018) period, dependent on the satisfactory completion of the Statutory Procedures, the economic appraisal and the availability of the necessary finance.

Procurement

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's policy on public procurement and what measures he is taking to support the local construction industry.

(AQO 1267/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In May 2002, the Executive agreed to a revised public procurement policy and the policy was launched in the Assembly on 27 May 2002, by the then Minister of Finance and Personnel.

A Procurement Board, chaired by the Minister of Finance and Personnel, was then established and given responsibility for the development, dissemination and co-ordination of public procurement policy and practice for the North's public sector. A new Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) was established within the Department of Finance and Personnel to develop policy and support the Procurement Board's role in all aspects of public procurement policy.

In addition to the CPD, there are a number of centres with specialist procurement expertise, across the public sector. The Executive considered that added value could be derived from these Centres of Expertise, both in developing operable policies and providing a more integrated procurement service to public bodies in general.

Public procurement is the process of the acquisition, usually by means of a contractual arrangement after public competition, of goods, services, works and other supplies by the public service. The administration of public procurement, by my Department, is governed by the principles of Accountability, Competitive Supply, Consistency, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Fair-dealing, Integration, Integrity, Informed Decision-Making, Legality, Responsiveness and Transparency.

My Department follows the guidance prepared by CPD and the Equality Commission on Sustainable Development and Equality of Opportunity in Public Sector Procurement. Roads Service has 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 apprenticeships. For major works schemes, Roads Service will follow the CPD guidelines that state that: 'Main contracts to include a requirement that the lead contractor recruits one long-term unemployed person, either directly or through the supply chain, for each £5 million of project value. These contracts also require the Lead Contractor to recruit one apprentice, either directly or through the supply chain, for each £2 million of project value.'

The process of procurement is a means to an end and achievement of that end through best value for money will only come about with the co-operation and innovation of suppliers. My Department is therefore developing partnerships with its suppliers to promote best procurement practice to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

In response to the economic downturn, the Minister for Finance and Personnel announced the formation of a Construction Industry Forum NI (CIFNI) Procurement Task Group in the Assembly in December 2008. One of its first tasks was to produce a Procurement Task Group Report which was presented to the Procurement Board in May 2009. The Report included 7 principles, to be applied to future Government construction procurement, as well as some 25 associated actions. Whilst some of these actions could be introduced with immediate effect, the full implementation of others required further detailed development work. A number of CIFNI Working Groups were established to agree specific proposals, including those designed to benefit small and medium sized enterprises and the local construction industry.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the next stages in the process to deliver the Belfast Rapid Transit System, following the public consultation.

(AQO 1268/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Following the public consultation on the policy proposals for Rapid Transit my Department has issued a Consultation Report and is currently progressing the required legislation with a view to introducing it to the Assembly in June 2010.

My Department hopes to be in a position to appoint consultants to assist with the preparation of an Outline Business Case for Belfast Rapid Transit later this year.

Rapid Transit Division are currently preparing layout drawings for the various route alignment options and these will, as part of the Outline Business Case process, form part of a public awareness exercise early in 2011.

A5: Environmental Issues

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to discuss the environmental issues surrounding the proposed A5 road with the Minister of the Environment and the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development.

(AQO 1269/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service and its A5 project consultants, Mouchel, have had, and will continue to have, discussions with officials from the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Both these Departments will also be formally consulted when the A5 Western Transport Corridor Environmental Statement is published this autumn. I do not intend to personally speak directly with the respective Ministers.

Department for Social Development

Benefit Fraud

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development the cost to her Department of benefit fraud over the last three years.

(AQW 6695/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The most recently published information regarding the cost of benefit fraud is set out in the table below. Progress continues to be made and the detection and prevention of fraud remains a high priority for the Department.

Year	2006			2007			2008		
Cost	Benefit Expend £m	Estimated Benefit Fraud £m	Benefit Fraud %	Benefit Expend £m	Estimated Benefit Fraud £m	Benefit Fraud %	Benefit Expend £m	Estimated Benefit Fraud £m	Benefit Fraud %
SSA	3501	18.1	0.5	3630	12.3	0.3	3789	12.6	0.3
Housing	438.9	3.3	0.8	442.3	2.9	0.6	467.9	3.0	0.6

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Environment

Planning Applications

In Bound Volume 36, page WA38, replace the answer to the question (AQW 2993/09) asked by Mr P Ramsey with:

While there is no specific policy for the assessment of planning applications in close proximity to high tension cables, my Department ensures that Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) are consulted on all individual planning applications on land crossed by existing overhead power lines, where it is appropriate to do so. NIE advise Divisional Planning Offices and developers on operational safe clearances for such proposals. The advice given by NIE with regard to the necessary clearance at a specific location is dependent on a number of factors. This includes the location of the line passing over and the lines' construction, design and operating voltage. Operators of overhead power lines are required to maintain safe conditions in compliance with legislation which are administered by my colleague Arlene Foster's Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI).

Paragraph 59 of PPS 1: General Principles clearly states that my Department's guiding principle in determining planning applications is that development should be permitted having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations unless the proposed development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. In such cases my Department has the power to refuse planning applications.

Divisional Planning Offices

In Bound Volume 37, page WA265, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4385/09) asked by Mr P Ramsey with:

My Department is duly bound to process each planning application on its individual merits. My Department's guiding principle in determining applications is that 'development should be permitted, having regard to the development plan and all material considerations, unless the proposed development will cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance' (PPS 1: General Principles, Paragraph 59). The Planning Service has no legal duty to refuse applications for housing development including where it is an extension to a home close to overhead electricity cables.

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 clearances for development proposals.

Finance and Personnel

Chief Executive and Chairperson of Non-departmental Public Bodies

In Bound Volume 50, page WA111, replace the answer to the question (AQW 4762/10) asked by Mr P Weir with:

During March 2010, I responded to your Assembly Question 4762/10 about the salary and expenses claimed by the Chief Executive and Chairperson of each non-departmental public body (NDPB).

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has now advised me that the information it provided for my response to you, on expenses for the Chairman of Northern Ireland Water (NIW), requires amendment. The expenses for the NIW Chairman were a total of three categories:

- (i) Amounts claimed directly by him,
- (ii) Amounts invoiced to NIW but 100% attributable to him; and
- (iii) Other common Board expenses for which the Chairman was allocated a share. This included Board dinners, lunches and other common expenses.

DRD now considers that category (iii) above should not have been included in the assessment of expenses claimed (this category was originally included in line with calculations completed for HM Revenue & Customs purposes). The original allocation of expenses to the NIW Chairman for 2007/08 has also been revised.

The amended position regarding expenses claimed is detailed below:

Year	Position and Company	Expenses
2007/08	Chairman of NIW	£3,076
2008/09	Chairman of NIW	£22,143

This letter will be copied to the Speaker, other members, the Assembly Library and to the Office of the Official Report (Hansard).

I trust this clarifies the matter for you. I apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Regional Development

NI Water Board Members

In Bound Volume 50, page WA144, replace the answer to the question (AQW 5689/10) asked by Mr G Savage with:

The information below replaces my previous answer on 24 March 2010, which provided incorrect details of expenses paid to the four non-executive NIW Board members. I apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has provided details of the fees and expenses paid to the four non-executive NIW Board members for the entirety of their time with NIW and these are set out in the table below. None of these non-executive Board members received any bonus or other payments during their time with NIW.

	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Fees	Expenses	Fees	Expenses	Fees	Expenses
Christopher Mellor	£70,500	£3,076	£159,000*	£22,143*	£87,882*	£14,965*
Ruth Thompson	£26,167	£633	£24,750	£3,994	£20,250	£2,586
John Ballard	£30,375	£1,088	£24,000	£7,911	£20,250	£4,849
Declan Gormley	£0	£0	£12,000	£71	£21,750	£22

* These fees and expenses figures reflect the fact that for part of 2008/09 and part of 2009/10 the NIW Chairman had undertaken a joint role as Chairman and Chief Executive within NIW.

Education

Education and Skills Authority

In Bound Volume 51, page WA43, replace the answer to the question (AQW 6175/10) asked by Ms Purvis with:

Tá sonraí ar na costais go dtí seo a bhaineann le bunú an Údaráis um Oideachas agus Scileanna leagtha amach sa tábla thíos:

Details of the costs to date in respect of the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority are set out in the table below:

	05/06 £'000	06/07 £'000	07/08 £'000	08/09 £'000	09/10* £'000	Total £'000
ESA Implementation Team	-	258	1,032	1,909	2,095	5,294
RPA Policy and Legislative Team	107	956	832	810	530	3,235
Total	107	1,214	1,864	2,719	2,625	8,529

Figures are disclosed as at 29 March 2010

Environment

Volume of Landfill

In Bound Volume 51, page WA260, replace the answer to the question (AQW 6353/10) asked by Mr T Elliott with:

Until December 2003, District Councils in Northern Ireland were the regulating authority for landfill facilities and in many instances were also the controlling operators of the landfill sites. NIEA therefore did not have the statutory power or responsibility to request landfill data from Councils prior to this date.

The Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme (NILAS) was introduced in April 2005 and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is the designated Monitoring Authority and maintains a landfill allowances register. District Councils are required to report on municipal waste each quarter including

tonnage figures of municipal waste collected, municipal waste sent to landfill and tonnage of municipal waste sent to waste facilities.

Data returns are made using the WasteDataFlow (WDF) UK-wide online database which has been in place since 2005. Councils electronically submit their statistical waste information to NIEA.

Data submissions from the Councils for the initial implementation year 2005/06 are incomplete. Additionally, Councils have not yet returned data for the fourth quarter of 2009/10. Consequently, the Agency only holds municipal waste data for the last 3.75 years.

The attached spreadsheet provides a detailed breakdown of the tonnage of municipal waste landfilled for the 3 Waste Groups, arc21, NWRWMG and SWaMP 2008 and for each District Council area for 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 (April –Dec only). The total tonnage of municipal waste landfilled in Northern Ireland was 786,951 tonnes, 749,449 tonnes, 694,904 tonnes and 512,604 tonnes respectively.

The Agency is not required and does not hold waste data for the total volume of landfill generated in each local council. This would include an extensive range of other waste streams as listed in the European Waste Catalogue (EWC).

Waste Management Group	District Council	Municipal Waste Landfilled 2006/07 (tonnes)	Municipal Waste Landfilled 2007/08 (tonnes)	Municipal waste landfilled 2008/09 (tonnes)	Municipal waste landfilled 2009/10 (Apr - Dec only) (tonnes)
arc21	Antrim Borough Council	19,414	20,005	18,811	13,728
	Ards Borough Council	36,745	36,355	31,552	21,513
	Ballymena Borough Council	28,136	26,618	22,890	17,268
	Belfast City Council	139,040	130,052	123,581	92,379
	Carrickfergus Borough Council	19,473	16,533	16,284	11,734
	Castlereagh Borough Council	21,524	20,767	19,678	14,632
	Down District Council	25,666	28,035	31,727	19,939
	Larne Borough Council	15,459	14,685	13,666	10,299
	Lisburn City Council	50,544	45,820	42,355	29,792
	Newtownabbey Borough Council	40,707	38,875	32,778	23,445
	North Down Borough Council	37,941	36,009	31,068	21,444
	arc21	434,649	413,754	384,390	276,173

Waste Management Group		Municipal Waste Landfilled 2006/07 (tonnes)	Municipal Waste Landfilled 2007/08 (tonnes)	Municipal waste landfilled 2008/09 (tonnes)	Municipal waste landfilled 2009/10 (Apr - Dec only) (tonnes)
	District Council				
NWRWMG	Ballymoney Borough Council	12,373	11,388	10,426	7,775
	Coleraine Borough Council	34,042	30,722	25,087	23,163
	Derry City Council	46,752	43,971	41,781	35,895
	Limavady Borough Council	13,171	13,283	11,821	9,576
	Magherafelt District Council	16,400	15,816	14,480	10,384
	Moyle District Council	8,418	7,607	6,976	6,137
	Strabane District Council	18,093	18,141	16,286	11,227
	NWRWMG	149,249	140,928	126,857	104,157
SWaMP2008	Armagh City & District Council	18,990	18,167	18,464	13,085
	Banbridge District Council	14,646	14,886	14,230	10,652
	Cookstown District Council	15,073	13,877	12,749	9,263
	Craigavon Borough Council	40,253	37,439	35,193	25,373
	Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	23,872	23,314	21,657	15,912
	Fermanagh District Council	30,419	30,711	27,484	18,459
	Newry & Mourne District Council	39,513	38,321	36,852	27,455
	Omagh District Council	20,287	18,048	17,027	12,076
	SWaMP2008	203,053	194,763	183,656	132,275
	Northern Ireland	786,951	749,445	694,903	512,605

Indexes

Members' Index

Adams, Mr Gerry

Private Members' Business
Economic Regeneration, 278, 279
Robberies, 304–5

Anderson, Ms Martina

Oral Answers
Airspace Closure, 355
Children and Young People's Unit, 189
Transport: Security Alerts, 353
Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 323, 324
I CAN Centre, 254
Written Answers
Altnagelvin Hospital, WA329
Dental Practices, WA175
Domiciliary Care from External Providers, WA111
Fold Housing Association Social Housing Scheme at Skeoge Road, Derry, WA303
Non-Domestic Rates, WA85
Preschool Nursery Provision, WA313–14
Regional Health and Social Care Board, WA106–7
Small Business Rates Relief Scheme, WA85
Western Health and Social Services Trust, WA178
Winter Fuel Payment, WA135

Armstrong, Mr Billy

Oral Answers
Graduate Employment, 152–3
Security, 34–5
Urgent Oral Answers
Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 301
Written Answers
EU Funding, WA269
Honours System, WA11

Attwood, Mr Alex

Private Members' Business
Economic Regeneration, 280, 281
Robberies, 306, 307
Written Answers
Early Years Strategy, WA166

Attwood, Mr Alex (as Representative of the Assembly Commission)

Oral Answers
Assembly Staff: Pay and Grading, 239–40

Beggs, Mr Roy

Executive Committee Business
High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 168–9, 170
Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09): Second Stage, 53–4

Oral Answers
Carrickfergus Primary Care Centre, 296–7
Foreign Direct Investment, 196–7
Irish Language Strategy, 143
Planning Service: Staffing, 236–7
Schools: Newbuild Projects, 146
Spending Cuts, 27–8
Stormont Estate: Newtownards Road Entrance, 239
Universities and Colleges: Advertising, 152

Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 317, 325, 326
Convergence Delivery Plan, 342, 343
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 133, 137–9

Written Answers
Funding for Rural Development Projects, WA15
Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments, WA204–5, WA206–7
New School Building for Young People with Visual Impairments, WA205–6
Surplus Property Assets, WA85–6

Bell, Mr Jonathan

Executive Committee Business
High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 167, 168
Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09): Second Stage, 56–7

Oral Answers
Community Facilities, 140–41
DOJ Priorities, 37–8
First Trust Bank, 195
Graduate Employment, 153
Ministerial Meetings, 149–50
Planning Service: Staffing, 236
Presbyterian Mutual Society, 31
STEM Subjects, 156

Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 327, 328
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 13, 14
Funding for Army Cadets, 42–3, 45, 46
I CAN Centre, 242

Boylan, Mr Cathal

Oral Answers

Brucellosis, 86–7

Transport: Security Alerts, 354

Written Answers

North/South Ministerial Council, WA194

Proposed Hotel at Magherafelt Road,
Castledawson, WA81–2**Boylan, Mr Cathal (as Chairperson of the
Committee for the Environment)**

Committee Business

Local Government (Disqualification)
(Amendment) Bill (NIA 7/09): Extension of
Committee Stage, 2Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):
Extension of Committee Stage, 178Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment)
Bill (NIA 10/09): Extension of Committee
Stage, 178

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage,
166–7Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):
Second Stage, 51–2

Private Members' Business

Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 129–30

Bradley, Mr Dominic

Oral Answers

Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, 294–5

Planning Service: Staffing, 235–6

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities, 225, 226

Convergence Delivery Plan, 336, 337, 338

Written Answers

South Eastern Regional College, WA64

Bradley, Mrs Mary

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS13, CS23,
CS24, CS25

Oral Answers

Chancellor of the Exchequer, 288

Community Facilities, 141–42

NEETs, 155–6

Newbuild Projects, 148–9

Tyrone County Hospital, 296

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan, 343

Over 60s Travel Pass, 121

Written Answers

NVQ Level 2, WA76

Road Safety Strategy, WA266

Rural Childcare Programme, WA23

US Visit, WA134–5

Victims of Crime, WA114

Bradley, Mr P J

Adjournment

B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road, 257–8

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 70

Oral Answers

DHSSPS: Joint Feasibility Study, 293–4

Invest NI: Agrifood, 200

Written Answers

Classroom Assistants, WA54–5

Daisy Hill Hospital Ambulance Service,
WA179–80

North–South Animal Health Hotline, WA14–15

Projected Birth Rates, WA86–7

Quinn Insurance, WA259–60

St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge,
WA165

Undocumented Irish Immigrants in America, WA1

Brady, Mr Mickey

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS5, CS6,
CS7, CS9, CS10, CS11, CS12, CS13, CS14,
CS16, CS18, CS19, CS20, CS21, CS22,
CS23, CS24, CS25

Oral Answers

Egg Producers, 88–9

Private Members' Business

Over 60s Travel Pass, 120–21

Written Answers

Disadvantaged Communities, WA10

Bresland, Mr Allan

Oral Answers

Artigarvan Primary School, 147

Belfast Marathon, 357

Road Safety: Drivers over 70, 237

Written Answers

Housing Executive Design Group, WA302

NAAFI Tea Products, WA136

Police and Criminal Evidence Regime, WA283

Browne, The Lord

Oral Answers

Flooding: East Belfast, 84–5

Physical Activity, 140

Strategic Investment Board: Chief Executive, 29

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities, 218, 219

Economic Regeneration, 277–8

Funding for Army Cadets, 44–5

Written Answers

Air Quality, WA266

Investment: East Belfast, WA257

Public Sector Reform, WA325

Burns, Mr Thomas

Written Answers

Ambulance Callout Time, WA99

Bomb Planted at Palace Barracks, WA276

Breaches of Licensing Laws, WA280, WA331–2

Cancelled Operations, WA178

CCTV Systems in Local Councils, WA174

Children: Teeth Extraction, WA96

Children with Dentures or False Teeth, WA97

Community Service, WA280

Contraband Items, WA286–7

Dangerous Dogs, WA16

Diesel Dipping, WA184

Domestic Rate Payers, WA85

Driving Licences, WA82–3

Executive Subcommittees on the Economy,
WA258

Free Hospital Car Parks (misuse of), WA103

Hospital Car Parks (clamping), WA94

IVF Treatment, WA274

Natural Teeth, WA96–7

Non-commissioned Works of Art, WA142–53

Offences of 'Wasting Police Time', WA280–81

Organs Donated, WA103

Police Officers, WA111, WA113

Retailers Selling Alcohol to Underage
Customers, WA277Roads at Bushforde and Bush Manor, Antrim,
WA191**Butler, Mr Paul**

Adjournment

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services, 112–13

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 207–8

Oral Answers

Foreign Direct Investment, 196–7

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 317, 318, 325

Economic Regeneration, 271–2, 273, 303

Written Answers

Adult Guidance Provision and Delivery, WA255–6

Campbell, Mr Gregory

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 208

Oral Answers

Children and Young People's Unit, 189

Private Members' Business

Economic Regeneration, 275, 279, 281

Written Answers

A2 Dualling from Maydown to Londonderry

Airport, WA338

Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Service,
WA337–8

Multiple Sclerosis, WA106

Newbuild for Ebrington Primary School,
Londonderry, WA56–7

Retention of Grammar Schools, WA56

Sheep Farmers, WA16

Clarke, Mr Trevor

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 168

Oral Answers

Planning Service: Staffing, 233

Private Members' Business

Robberies, 315

Written Answers

Accident and Emergency Units, WA180–81

Bimaxillary Osteotomy Procedure, WA271

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA13

Mains Water Pipe on the Tamblough Road
between Randalstown and Portglenone, WA291

Maxillo-facial Surgery, WA271, WA326

Universities: Local Students, WA172

Waiting Lists, WA183

Clarke, Mr Willie

Adjournment

B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road, 258–9

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 68–9, 79–80

Oral Answers

Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, 89

Written Answers

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick, WA109, WA110

Hospital Car Parking Charges, WA110, WA182–3

Housing Waiting List, WA293

Nursery Class at Annaclone Primary School,
WA249

Cobain, Mr Fred

Urgent Oral Answers
Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 299

Written Answers
Budget 2010–11, WA330
DCAL Projects: North Belfast, WA163
Rates: Early Payment, WA324

Coulter, Rev Dr Robert

Adjournment
Castle Tower School, Ballymena, 361–2

Oral Answers
DOE: Legislative Programme, 235
Water Charges: Utility Regulator, 356

Written Answers
Economic Growth, WA258
Education and Library Boards, WA166–7
Farm Modernisation Programme, WA22–3
Presbyterian Mutual Society, WA12
Redundancies, WA171
Vandalism of Schools, WA53

**Coulter, Rev Dr Robert (as Representative of the
Assembly Commission)**

Oral Answers
North/South Parliamentary Forum, 239
Speaker: US Visit, 238

Craig, Mr Jonathan

Adjournment
Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services,
113–14

Committee Stages
Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS12

Oral Answers
Farm Modernisation Programme, 90
Migration: Public Services, 287

Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 318, 319

Written Answers
Education and Library Boards, WA167
Funding to Groups in Lagan Valley, WA18
Myalgic Encephalopathy, WA179
Parkinson's Disease, WA329
Retailers Prosecuted for Selling Tobacco to
Minors, WA97–8

Cree, Mr Leslie

Committee Business
Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 205–6
Special European Union Programmes Body,
5–6, 9

Oral Answers
Flooding: East Belfast, 85
Oil Prices, 199
Review of Public Administration / Local
Government, 235
Roads: North Down, 352–3
STEM Subjects, 156–7

Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 319–20
Credit Unions, 181–2
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 15, 16
Funding for Army Cadets, 43–4

Written Answers
Bee Health Strategy, WA22
Disabled Young People: Outdoor Pursuits,
WA165
Executive's Prompt Payment Policy, WA299
Housing Association Guide, WA298, WA299
Housing Associations (Fair Payment Charter),
WA301
Housing Associations (monitoring contractors),
WA301
Housing Associations (payments to
subcontractors), WA299
Paying Suppliers, WA299
Planning Service Staff, WA262
Poor Payment Performance by a Subcontractor,
WA301

Dallat, Mr John

Executive Committee Business
High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage,
170, 171, 176

Oral Answers
Planning Service: Staffing, 232–3

Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 320–21
Community Access to School Facilities, 221, 222
Credit Unions, 183–4
Over 60s Travel Pass, 122–3
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 131

Written Answers
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Team, WA264
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland,
WA185
Damage to Vehicles as a Result of Potholes,
WA343

Digital Inclusion, WA324
Driving Instruction Industry, WA173
Hanwood Trust Filling Station, WA83–4
Knock Golf Club, Belfast, WA103–5, WA263–4,
WA274–5
Lampposts and Kerb stones, WA126–7
Mains Water Supply, WA127
NI Court Service Employees, WA289
No Smoking Campaigns, WA94
Obesity Awareness Campaigns, WA94–5
Payments for NI Water Services, WA190
Ratepayers (debit/credit card payments), WA86
St Paul's College, Kilrea, WA59
Witnesses, WA276

Dallat, Mr John (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment
B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road, 257
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure, 139, 140, 142, 144,
145
Education, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149
Employment and Learning, 151, 153, 154,
155, 156
Private Members' Business
I CAN Centre, 244, 247, 248, 249, 250, 252,
256
Robberies, 303, 307, 308, 309, 311
Urgent Oral Answers
Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 297,
299, 300, 301, 302

Deeny, Dr Kieran

Adjournment
Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore, 159, 160–61
Oral Answers
Tyrone County Hospital, 296

Dodds, Mr Nigel

Urgent Oral Answers
Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 297, 298

Doherty, Mr Pat

Written Answers
First Trust Bank, WA323
Road Maintenance, WA344

**Doherty, Mr Pat (as Representative of the
Assembly Commission)**

Oral Answers
Assembly Committees: Paper Use, 240
Legislation, 240–41

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey

Adjournment
Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services,
110–12, 117
Private Members' Business
I CAN Centre, 251–2, 255

Durkan, Mr Mark

Oral Answers
Administration of Justice (Language) Act
(Ireland) 1737, 33
Private Members' Business
Credit Unions, 179–80, 181
Written Answers
Child Protection Register, WA177
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA13
Retired Teachers, WA252
Spending Plan 2010–11, WA329–30
St Andrews Agreement: Working Group, WA193–4
State Funded Nursery Places (Shantallow), WA253
Western Health and Social Services Board,
WA181–2

Easton, Mr Alex

Committee Stages
Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS5
Oral Answers
Chancellor of the Exchequer, 287
UK Government, 190
Private Members' Business
Over 60s Travel Pass, 119–20, 126–7
Written Answers
Antisocial Behaviour, WA276
Benefit Fraud, WA347
Chief Executive Bonuses, WA272
Co-Ownership Budget, WA298
Community Policing, WA277
Coroners Service for Northern Ireland Website,
WA288
DOJ: Budget, WA186
Holywood Police Station, WA113
Homeless People, WA133
Legislation, WA277
Mental Health (NI) Order 1986, WA177
Migrant Workers, WA75–6
Obesity Strategy, WA175
Orthodontist Services, WA175–6
Police Officers, WA113
Road Infrastructure in the Beechfield Estate,
Donaghadee, WA126
Schools: Holywood, WA168–9
Sentences for Sex Crimes, WA184–5

Specialist Multidisciplinary Child and
Adolescent Mental Health Services, WA327
Tamiflu Tablets, WA177
Welcome Organisation, WA133

Elliott, Mr Tom

Executive Committee Business
Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 69–70, 80, 97
Oral Answers
Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, 90
Points of Order, 357
Private Members' Business
Economic Regeneration, 279, 280, 284
Quangos and Arm's–Length Bodies of
Government Departments, 103, 104
Revised Written Answers
Volume of Landfill, RWA3–5
Written Answers
A5: Environmental Issues, WA347
Administrative Burden on Farmers, WA17
Attorney General, WA309
Bovine Tuberculosis, WA17–18
Bypass Road for Dungannon, WA115
Dentists in the Western Health and Social
Services Trust, WA178–9
Dissident Terrorist Activity, WA288, WA332
Government Funding of Clubs and Facilities, WA25
GPs Practising in the Western Health and
Social Services Trust, WA178
Incidences of Brucellosis and Tuberculosis,
WA137–8
Investment in Infrastructure, WA127–8
New Dual Carriageway which Bypasses Newry,
WA116
NI Water (capital investment requirement),
WA188
NI Water (capital projects), WA188–90
Northern Ireland Environment Agency, WA77
Ploughing Championships, WA24
Police Federation, WA332
Volume of Landfill, WA260

**Empey, Sir Reg (Minister for Employment and
Learning)**

Oral Answers
Graduate Employment, 152–3
NEETs, 154–6
Programme–led Apprenticeships, 153–4
STEM Subjects, 156–7
Universities and Colleges: Advertising, 151–2
Written Answers
Adult Guidance Provision and Delivery, WA255–6
Apprenticeships, WA171–2

Careers Guidance, WA171
Careers Resource Centres, WA254–5
Essential Skills Programme, WA65
Lecturers, WA66–8
NEETs, WA170
Redundancies, WA171
Regional Colleges (links with other
institutions), WA169–70
Regional Colleges of Further and Higher
Education (sickness absence), WA65–6
South Eastern Regional College, WA64
Universities: Local Students, WA172

Farry, Dr Stephen

Committee Business
Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 212, 213
Executive Committee Business
Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill (NIA
16/09): Second Stage, 269–70
Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 80–81, 94,
95, 98–9
Oral Answers
Chancellor of the Exchequer, 287–8
Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, 295
Oil Prices, 199–200
Parades, 33
Roads: North Down, 352
Private Members' Business
Economic Regeneration, 276, 277, 282
Quangos and Arm's–Length Bodies of
Government Departments, 104–5, 106
Robberies, 307
Written Answers
Bamford Action Plan, WA273
Ciubotaru v Moldov Judgement by the
European Court of Human Rights, WA309
Community Mental Health Services, WA328
Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist for
the Royal Hospital, WA269–70
'Invest to Save' Initiative, WA1
Recommendation from a Boundary
Commission, WA262–3
Single Bill on Mental Health, WA272–3

Ford, Mr David (Minister of Justice)

Oral Answers
Administration of Justice (Language) Act
(Ireland) 1737, 33–4
DOJ Priorities, 36–8
Maghaberry Prison, 35–6
Magilligan Prison, 39–40
Security, 34–5

Private Members' Business

Robberies, 312, 313, 314, 315

Written Answers

Alleged Victims of Sexual Assault, WA335

Annual Crime Figures, WA334

Antisocial Behaviour Orders, WA185–6,
WA287, WA333, WA336

Antisocial Behaviour (tackling), , WA276

Assaults

Against Pregnant Women, WA187, WA283
on Police Officers, WA288
on Prison Staff, WA187

Bomb Planted at Palace Barracks, WA276

Breaches of Licensing Laws, WA280, WA331–2

Causeway Computer System, WA278

Children and Young People on Bail, WA333

Clearance Rates for Burglary, Rape and
Assault, WA334

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy,
WA115

Community Policing, WA277

Community Service, WA280

Contraband Items, WA286–7

Convicted Sex Offenders, WA332–3

Coroners Service for Northern Ireland Website,
WA288

Courts Service Translators, WA283–5

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland,
WA185

Detention Conditions in Prison, WA275

Diesel Dipping, WA184

Dissident Republican Threat, WA282

Dissident Terrorist Activity, WA288, WA332

DOJ: Budget, WA186

DOJ: Staff Payments, WA184

Domestic Abuse, WA333–4

Drugs Culture Inside Prisons, WA285–6

Electronic Monitoring, WA111–12

Foreign Nationals Serving Prison Sentences,
WA187

Hollywood Police Station, WA113

Irish Language (promotion of), WA281

Justice Ministers' Meeting, WA114–15

Juvenile Prison Population, WA279

Legislation, WA277

Low-copy DNA Testing, WA286

Minutes of High Court Meetings, WA289

Newtownhamilton Police Station, WA282

NI Court Service Employees, WA289

Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries
Compensation Scheme, WA283

Offences of 'Wasting Police Time', WA280–81

Offensive Weapons, WA334–5

Permanent Secretary, WA115

Police and Criminal Evidence Regime, WA283

Police Federation, WA332

Police Officers, WA111, WA113

Police Reserves, WA186

Policing of Parades in 2010, WA112

Prison Service Equality Statement and Report,
WA287

Prison Spaces, WA279

PSNI

Entry Examinations, WA286

Stations, WA282

Stop and Search Powers, WA186–7

Recorded Incidents of Violence, WA335–6

Restorative Justice, WA275–6

Retailers Selling Alcohol to Underage
Customers, WA277

Review of McClurg v the Chief Constable,
WA282–3

Sentences for Sex Crimes, WA184–5

Sentencing Guidelines Council, WA114

Sex Offenders (from outside UK), WA113–14

Sex Offenders Register, WA279

Solicitors Fees, WA278

Street Pastors Organisation, WA287–8

Tasers, WA288–9

Tort Law and the Human Rights Act, WA289

Unsolved Murders, WA334

Victims of Crime, WA114

Witnesses, WA276

Youth Conferencing with the Youth Justice
Agency, WA288

Youth Justice Agency (number of cases),
WA278–9

**Foster, Mrs Arlene (Minister of Enterprise, Trade
and Investment)**

Oral Answers

First Trust Bank, 194–6

Foreign Direct Investment, 196–7

Invest NI: Agrifood, 200

Oil Prices, 198–200

Universities: Innovation, 197–8

Private Members' Business

Credit Unions, 184–6

Development of a Jobs Strategy, 22, 23, 24, 25

Written Answers

Corporation Tax, WA259

Economic Growth, WA258

Employment Opportunities in the Comber Area,
WA318

Executive Subcommittees on the Economy,
WA258

Feed-in Tariffs, WA173
Ferry Operators and Tourism, WA318
Fuel Poverty, WA257
Funding Debt Services, WA75
International Events, WA172
Investment: East Belfast, WA257
Legacy of the Titanic, WA69–75
Migrant Workers, WA75–6
Northern Ireland Tourist Board, WA68–9
NVQ Level 2, WA76
Quinn Insurance, WA256, WA257–8, WA259–60
Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020, WA75
Tourism: Volcanic Eruption, WA258
Wind Turbines, WA256–7

Gallagher, Mr Tommy

Executive Committee Business
Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):
Second Stage, 54
Oral Answers
Brucellosis, 87
First Trust Bank, 195
Written Answers
International Events, WA172

Gardiner, Mr Samuel

Oral Answers
FM/DFM: US Visit, 192
Security, 34–5
Universities: Innovation, 198
Written Answers
Boards of Governors, WA45–50
Integrated Schools Enrolment, WA37–40,
WA44–5, WA50–52, WA238–9
Integrated Schools: (funding), WA246–7
Irish–Medium and Integrated Schools, WA245–6
Post–Primary Education Planning in the Lurgan
and Portadown Areas, WA42
Pupil: Teacher Ratio, WA209–36, WA245–6
Road Surfaces, WA345
School Building Projects, WA41, WA247–9

Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Executive Committee Business
Forestry Bill
Consideration Stage, 61–5, 72, 73, 74,
75, 76, 77–8, 82–3, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100
Further Consideration Stage, 271

Oral Answers

Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, 89–90
Brucellosis, 86–7
Egg Producers, 87–9
Farm Modernisation Programme, 90
Flooding: East Belfast, 84–5
Rural Communities: Severe Weather
Compensation, 85–6

Written Answers

Administrative Burden on Farmers, WA17
Bee Health Strategy, WA22
Bovine Tuberculosis, WA17–18
Closet River, Kinnego, WA16–17
Dangerous Dogs, WA16
Enhancement of Bogs and Peatlands, WA138–9
Farm Modernisation Scheme, WA14, WA22–3
Farms with Incinerators, WA199
Fishing Organisations, WA22
Funding for Rural Development Projects, WA15
Funding to Groups in Lagan Valley, WA18
Glastry Ice Cream, WA311
Incidences of Brucellosis and Tuberculosis,
WA137–8
Livestock Marts: Help Desks, WA24–5
Livestock Theft, WA23–4
North–South Animal Health Hotline, WA14–15
Ploughing Championships, WA24
Rural Childcare Programme, WA23
Seed Mussel Fishery at Copeland Sound,
Donaghadee, WA22
Sheep Farmers, WA16
Single Farm Payments
applications received, WA18–21
assistance, WA138
reviewing decisions, WA139–42
unsuccessful claims, WA196–9
Wild Mussel Fishery at Copeland Sound,
Donaghadee, WA139
Wind Turbines, WA24

Hamilton, Mr Simon

Committee Business
Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 203, 204
Executive Committee Business
Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill (NIA
16/09): Second Stage, 267–8
Oral Answers
Invest NI: Agrifood, 200
Private Members' Business
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 16, 17

Written Answers

Barnett Formula, WA268
Civil Service: Absenteeism, WA325
Galbally GAA Club: Hunger Strike
Commemoration, WA163–4

Hamilton, Mr Simon (as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development)

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS3, CS5, CS7, CS8, CS9, CS10, CS11, CS12, CS13, CS14, CS15, CS16, CS17, CS18, CS19, CS20, CS21, CS22, CS23, CS24, CS25, CS26

Hilditch, Mr David

Oral Answers

Carrickfergus Primary Care Centre, 296
Universities and Colleges: Advertising, 151–2

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan, 341–2

Written Answers

Antisocial Behaviour Orders, WA185–6, WA333
Temporary Staff in the Health Service, WA174
Tourism: Volcanic Eruption, WA258

Irwin, Mr William

Oral Answers

Egg Producers, 87–8

Private Members' Business

Robberies, 311

Written Answers

Sentencing Guidelines Council, WA114

Kelly, Mrs Dolores

Oral Answers

DOE: Legislative Programme, 235
Legislation (increased number of Bills), 240–41
Parades Working Group, 193
Transport: Security Alerts, 354

Written Answers

St Patrick's College, Banbridge, WA236–7

Kelly, Mr Gerry (as junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister)

Oral Answers

Children and Young People (services for), 187–8
Children and Young People's Unit, 189
Commissioner for Older People, 192–3

Kennedy, Mr Danny

Oral Answers

Children and Young People, 188
Cross-Border Public Transport, 351–2

DOJ Priorities, 38

EU Funding, 291

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan, 348, 349

Economic Regeneration, 275–6, 278

Urgent Oral Answers

Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 301

Written Answers

European Investment Bank Funding, WA135
Tobacco Products, WA331

Kinahan, Mr Danny

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 174

Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):

Second Stage, 57–8

Oral Answers

Arts Funding, 142–3

School Inspections, 147–8

Private Members' Business

Over 60s Travel Pass, 121

Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 128–9

Written Answers

Financial Position of Pensioners, WA303
Free Travel on Public Transport, WA129
Lough Neagh Advisory Committee and the Lower Bann Advisory Committee, WA265
PSNI Entry Examinations, WA286
Public Hire Taxis, WA339–40
Roads Service Repair Schemes, WA338
Savings Target, WA194
Social Housing, WA134
Solicitors Fees, WA278
Stormont Estate, WA305

Leonard, Mr Billy

Oral Answers

Commissioner for Older People, 192

Irish Language Strategy, 143

Migration: Public Services, 286

Rural Communities: Severe Weather Compensation, 85–6

Stormont Estate: Newtownards Road Entrance, 238–9

Water Charges: Utility Regulator, 356

Points of Order, 39

Private Members' Business

Over 60s Travel Pass, 122

Written Answers

Accident and Emergency Unit in the Causeway Hospital, WA328

Dungiven: Regeneration, WA135

Grand Opera House, WA162

Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020, WA75

Lo, Ms Anna

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS5, CS10, CS11, CS15, CS17, CS18, CS23, CS25

Executive Committee Business

High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 171

Oral Answers

Arts Funding, 142

Community Relations: East Londonderry, 32

Migration: Public Services, 286

Newbuild Projects, 149

Programme-led Apprenticeships, 154

Universities: Innovation, 197–8

Written Answers

Business Studies, Postgraduate Certificate in Education, WA53–4

Careers Resource Centres, WA254–5

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA240

Employment and Support Allowance, WA132–3

Farm Modernisation Scheme, WA14

Planning Service (funding), WA268–9

Planning Service Staff, WA267

Purchasing of Freehold Property, WA268

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, WA174–5

Saintfield Road, WA292–3

South Belfast Regeneration Area, WA132

Victims of People Trafficking, WA109

Village Renewal Area of South Belfast, WA293–4

Warm Homes Plus, WA132

Long, Mrs Naomi

Oral Answers

Flooding: East Belfast, 84

Security, 35

Spending Cuts, 28

UK Government, 190

Written Answers

Community Relations Budget, WA250, WA310

Education and Skills Authority, WA56

Green Wedge Between Dundonald and Belfast, WA321–2

Job Evaluations within the Education and Library Boards, WA55, WA204

Nursery School Places, WA252

Planning Service Staff, WA319–21

Sustainable Development Commissioner, WA12–13

Lunn, Mr Trevor

Adjournment

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services, 113

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 321, 322, 323, 326, 330

Community Access to School Facilities, 222–3

Convergence Delivery Plan, 338, 339

I CAN Centre, 246–7

Written Answers

Maze Development Corporation, WA137

Maze/Long Kesh Delivery Unit, WA137

Maze/Long Kesh Site (bodies established), WA310

Maze/Long Kesh Site (expenditure), WA310

Maze Project (consultation and development bodies), WA137

Value Added Score at GCSE A-Level, WA254

McCallister, Mr John

Adjournment

B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road, 259–60

Oral Answers

Airspace Closure, 354–5

DHSSPS: Joint Feasibility Study, 294

First Trust Bank, 195–6

Rural Communities: Severe Weather Compensation, 85–6

Private Members' Business

Caravans Bill (NIA 17/09): First Stage, 11

Convergence Delivery Plan, 348, 349

Economic Regeneration, 280

I CAN Centre, 244, 245, 255

Written Answers

Corporation Tax, WA259

Parliament Buildings: Car Parking, WA305

McCann, Mr Fra

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS8, CS9, CS14, CS17, CS19, CS21, CS22, CS23, CS24

Written Answers

Funding Debt Services, WA75, WA131

Social Housing Dwellings, WA294

McCann, Ms Jennifer

Oral Answers

Arts Funding, 144

Newbuild Projects, 149

Private Members' Business

Development of a Jobs Strategy, 17, 18, 23

Written Answers

Block Grant for Fuel Poverty, WA298
Corporation Tax, WA323
Cuts to Services in the Colin Area of West Belfast, WA96
Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School, WA249–50
Primary School Funding, WA55–6
Review of Maternity Services, WA184
Women and Children's Hospital, WA111

McCann, Ms Jennifer (as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel)

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 204, 215–17
Special European Union Programmes Body, 3–4

McCarthy, Mr Kieran

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 70–71, 73

Oral Answers

Arts Funding, 145
Commissioner for Older People, 193
Ministerial Meetings, 150
Multiple Sclerosis, 291–2
Review of Public Administration/Local Government, 233–4

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities, 219
Credit Unions, 181
Funding for Army Cadets, 44
I CAN Centre, 250, 254, 255, 256
Over 60s Travel Pass, 122, 123, 125
Robberies, 313
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 131–2

Written Answers

Accident and Emergency Services in the Antrim Area Hospital, WA329
Housing Executive Design Group, WA300
I CAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch Primary School, WA57

McCartney, Mr Raymond

Oral Answers

Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme, 139–40
Planning Applications, 233

Private Members' Business

Funding for Army Cadets, 42, 43

Written Answers

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA10–11

McCausland, Mr Nelson (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)

Oral Answers

Arts Funding, 142–3, 144–5
Community Facilities, 140–42
Irish Language Strategy, 143–4
Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme, 139–40
Physical Activity, 140

Written Answers

2012 Olympics, WA164
Belfast Education and Library Board's Library Service, WA161–2
Creative Industries, WA162–3
DCAL Projects: North Belfast, WA163
Disabled Young People: Outdoor Pursuits, WA165
Festival of Fools, WA164
Galbally GAA Club: Hunger Strike Commemoration, WA163–4
Government Funding of Clubs and Facilities, WA25
Grand Opera House, WA162
Libraries NI (annual net cost), WA202
Libraries NI (libraries previously controlled by BELB), WA25–35, WA36, WA153–60, WA160–61
Libraries NI (retirement age), WA311
Maintenance of Libraries, WA200–201
Non-commissioned Works of Art, WA142–53
Tony McCoy, WA202

McClarty, Mr David

Oral Answers

Multiple Sclerosis, 292

Written Answers

Festival of Fools, WA164
NI Direct, WA14

McClarty, Mr David (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment

Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore, 157, 159, 163

Oral Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development, 84, 87

Private Members' Business

Economic Regeneration, 275, 277, 279, 281, 282, 283
Quangos and Arm's-Length Bodies of Government Departments, 100, 102, 103, 106, 108

McCrea, Mr Basil

Adjournment

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services, 114–15

Oral Answers

Artigarvan Primary School, 147
Planning Applications, 233

Strategic Investment Board: Chief Executive, 29–30
Transport: Security Alerts, 353–4
Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 330
Community Access to School Facilities, 229, 230
Convergence Delivery Plan, 332, 333, 338, 358
I CAN Centre, 245, 248, 250, 251
Written Answers
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA115
Livestock Theft, WA23–4

McCrea, Mr Ian

Committee Stages
Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA 6/09), CS2
Oral Answers
Airspace Closure, 355
Review of Public Administration/Local Government, 234–5
Road Safety Strategy, 237–8
Private Members' Business
Robberies, 303–4, 315
Urgent Oral Answers
Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 300–301
Written Answers
Housing Improvement Schemes: Mid-Ulster, WA133–4
Wind Turbines, WA24

McDevitt, Mr Conall

Committee Business
Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 214
Oral Answers
Assembly Committees: Paper Use, 240
Brand-named Drugs, 293
Children and Young People's Unit, 188–9
DOJ: Staff Payments, WA184
Free School Meals, 151
Migration: Public Services, 286–7
Physical Activity, 140
Spending Cuts, 28
Traffic Wardens, WA336
Water Charges: Utility Regulator, 356
Private Members' Business
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 19–20
Economic Regeneration, 278, 282, 283
I CAN Centre, 248
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 133, 134

Written Answers

Applied Behaviour Analysis in Treating Autism, WA275, WA316–17
Arabs Resident in Northern Ireland, WA268
Asbestos, WA102
C2k Contracts, WA41
Careers Guidance, WA171
Displaced Staff in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, WA110
Emotional Well-being in Schools, WA63, WA208–9
Metro and Ulsterbus Fleet, WA343
New Trains Purchased Under Objective 3 of Public Service Agreement 13, WA344
Northern Ireland Prison Service and Northern Ireland Court Service, WA84
Physiotherapists, WA101–2
Prison Service Equality Statement and Report, WA287
Residents' Parking Scheme in the Lower Malone and Lower Lisburn Road Areas, WA340
Runway at Belfast City Airport, WA322
Vacant Physiotherapy Posts, WA99–101
Wakehurst Building in the City Hospital, WA97
Waterside Hospital in Derry, WA110

McDonnell, Dr A

Committee Business
Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 211, 212
Oral Answers
Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, 289
Universities: Innovation, 198
Private Members' Business
Credit Unions, 186
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 12–13
Economic Regeneration, 273–4, 275
Written Answers
Sharing and Integration, WA133

McElduff, Mr Barry

Adjournment
Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore, 157–9
Oral Answers
Artigarvan Primary School, 147
Cross-border Public Transport, 350–51
UK Government, 190
Private Members' Business
Car Insurance Premiums, 330
Quangos and Arm's-Length Bodies of Government Departments, 108, 109, 110

Written Answers

A-level Students, WA168
International Ambassadors and Honorary
Consuls, WA7–10
Irish–medium Unit at St Joseph’s Grammar
School, Donaghmore, WA165
Justice Ministers’ Meeting, WA114–15
Planning Service Posts at County Hall, Omagh,
WA263
Quinn Insurance, WA257–8

McGill, Mrs Claire

Adjournment

Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore, 161, 163

Oral Answers

Arts Funding, 142
Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation,
289–90
Tyrone County Hospital, 295–6

Written Answers

Senior Civil Service, WA193

**McGimpsey, Mr Michael (Minister of Health, Social
Services and Public Safety)**

Adjournment

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services,
115–16, 117
Primary Healthcare: Carrickmore, 161–2, 163

Executive Committee Business

Sunbeds Bill (NIA 18/09): First Stage, 201

Oral Answers

Brand-named Drugs, 292–3
Carrickfergus Primary Care Centre, 296–7
DHSSPs: Joint Feasibility Study, 293–4
Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, 294–5
Multiple Sclerosis, 291–2
Tyrone County Hospital, 295–6

Urgent Oral Answers

Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 297–302

Written Answers

Accident and Emergency Services in the Antrim
Area Hospital, WA329
Accident and Emergency Unit in the Causeway
Hospital, WA328
Accident and Emergency Units (waiting times),
WA180–81
Altnagelvin Hospital, WA329
Ambulance Callout Time, WA99
Animal Experiment Projects (severity band), WA89
Animal Experiments (numbers of), WA93–4
Animal Research Facility Inspectors, WA91–2
Animal Testing Procedures, WA90

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986,
WA88–9

Animals Used for Toxicity Testing, WA89–90,
WA92

Applied Behaviour Analysis in Treating Autism,
WA275

Asbestos, WA102

Bamford Action Plan, WA273

Basic Salary for Doctors, WA99

Benefits for People with Parkinson’s Disease,
WA108

Bimaxillary Osteotomy Procedure, WA271

Bonuses Paid to Doctors, WA271–2

Breaches of the Anti-Smoking Legislation,
WA270–71

Budget 2010–11, WA330

Cancelled Operations, WA178

Cancer and Diabetes Service, WA327

Car Parking Charges, WA110, WA182–3

Causeway Hospital: Renal Unit, WA330–31

Charities, WA272

Chief Executive Bonuses, WA272

Child Protection Register, WA177

Children: Teeth Extraction, WA96

Children with Dentures or False Teeth, WA97

Children’s Health Services, WA176

Community Mental Health Services, WA328

Confidential Patient Records, WA108

Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist for
the Royal Hospital, WA269–70

Cuts to Services in the Colin Area of West
Belfast, WA96

Daisy Hill Hospital Ambulance Service,
WA179–80

Delays for Hospital Treatment, WA175

Dental Practices, WA175

Dentists in the Western Health and Social
Services Trust, WA178–9

Desertcreat College in Cookstown, WA106,
WA272

DEXA Scans on Bone Density, WA105

Displaced Staff in the Western Health and
Social Care Trust, WA110

Domiciliary Care, WA95

Domiciliary Care from External Providers, WA111

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick, WA109, WA110

Free Hospital Car Parks (misuse of), WA103

Front-line services, WA326

Funding Cuts, WA275

Gorse Fires, WA272

GPs Practising in the Western Health and
Social Services Trust, WA178

Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy, WA95–6

Health Service Dentist Posts, WA270

Hospital Car Parking Charges, WA110, WA182–3

Hospital Car Parks (clamping), WA94

Increased Mileage Claims, WA326

Injections of the Enzyme Collagenase, WA110–11

Inpatients, WA330

IVF Treatment, WA271, WA274

Knock Golf Club, Belfast, WA103–5, WA274–5

Maternity Services Provided by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, WA328

Maxillo-facial Surgery, WA271, WA326

Mental Health (NI) Order 1986, WA177

Mice Used in Toxicology Tests, WA92

Minors Charged with Criminal Offences, WA105

Mother and Baby Clinic in Crumlin, WA327

Multiple Sclerosis, WA106, WA107–8

Muscular Dystrophy Care Advisor Posts, WA102–3

Myalgic Encephalopathy, WA179

Natural Teeth, WA96–7

No Smoking Campaigns, WA94

Non-human Primate, WA91

Nursing and Residential Care, WA96

Obesity Awareness Campaigns, WA94–5

Obesity Strategy, WA175

Organs Donated, WA103

Orthodontist Services, WA175–6

Parkinson's Disease (consultants), WA329

Parkinson's Disease (funding), WA108

Parkinson's Disease (numbers of people), WA108

Patient Mortality Rate, WA102

People Sent to the UK Mainland for Operations, WA95

People with Asthma (24 hour access to primary care), WA182

Personal Asthma Action Plan, WA182

Physiotherapists (not working), WA101–2

Physiotherapy for Curvature of the Spine, WA109

Physiotherapy for Patients with Multiple Sclerosis, WA99

Physiotherapy Treatment (children), WA177

Pollution from the George Best Belfast City Airport, WA182

Prevention of Communicable Diseases, WA176

Procedures on Living Animals (new projects), WA89

Public Health Agency, WA176

Public Health (funding), WA176

Regional Health and Social Care Board, WA106–7

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, WA174–5

Retailers Prosecuted for Selling Tobacco to Minors, WA97–8

Review of Maternity Services, WA184

Review of Public Administration, WA326

Single Bill on Mental Health, WA272–3

Specialist Multidisciplinary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, WA327

Spending Plan 2010–11, WA329–30

Staff Posts at County Hall, Ballymena, WA273–4, WA327

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Northern Ireland 2008, WA87–8, WA92–3

Tamiflu Tablets, WA177

Temporary Staff in the Health Service, WA174

Tobacco Products, WA331

Vacant Physiotherapy Posts, WA99–101

Victims of People Trafficking, WA109

Waiting Lists, WA183

Wakehurst Building in the City Hospital, WA97

Waterside Hospital in Derry, WA110

Western Health and Social Services Board (staff acting up), WA181–2

Western Health and Social Services Trust (staff numbers), WA178

Women and Children's Hospital, WA111

McGlone, Mr Patsy

Oral Answers

Cross-border Public Transport, 351

DOJ Priorities, 38

FM/DFM: US Visit, 190–91

Irish Language Strategy, 143–4

Multiple Sclerosis, 292

Parades, 32–3

Review of Public Administration/Local Government, 234

Rural Communities: Severe Weather Compensation, 85–6

Speaker: US Visit, 238

STEM Subjects, 157

Urgent Oral Answers

Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 302

Written Answers

Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road Junction at Castledawson, WA290

Civil Service: 2009 Pay Award, WA325

Customer First Programme, WA304

Electronic Planning Information for Citizens, WA322

Magherafelt Social Security Office Staff, WA303

Planning Service Staff, WA262

McGuinness, Mr Martin (deputy First Minister)

Oral Answers

Children and Young People (services for), 187
Children and Young People's Unit, 189
Commissioner for Older People, 192
FM/DFM: US Visit, 190–92
Parades Working Group, 193
UK Government, 190

Written Answers

Assembly Ombudsman, WA308–9
Attorney General, WA309
British–Irish Council, WA195
Child Sexual Abuse, WA13
Childcare Places in Women's Centres, WA1–2
Ciubotaru v Moldov Judgement by the
European Court of Human Rights, WA309
Civil Contingencies Policy Branch, WA195
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy,
WA10–11, WA13, WA308
Community Relations Budget, WA310
Community Relations Council, WA6
Disadvantaged Communities, WA10
Executive for the North–South Ministerial
Council, WA6–7
Executive's Senior Legal Officer, WA7
Funding for Childcare Provision, WA307–8
Honours System, WA11, WA309
International Ambassadors and Honorary
Consuls, WA7–10
'Invest to Save' Initiative, WA1
Maze Development Corporation, WA137
Maze/Long Kesh Delivery Unit, WA137
Maze/Long Kesh Site (bodies established),
WA310
Maze/Long Kesh Site (expenditure), WA310
Maze Project (consultation and development
bodies), WA137
NI Direct, WA14
North/South Ministerial Council (permanent
accommodation), WA194
Parades Working Group, WA193
Presbyterian Mutual Society, WA12
Projects in North Belfast, WA2–6
Quangos, WA7
Reorganisation, WA194
Savings Target, WA194
Senior Civil Service, WA193
St Andrews Agreement: Working Group,
WA193–4
Sustainable Development Commissioner,
WA12–13, WA310
Undocumented Irish Immigrants in America, WA1
Victims' Groups: Funding, WA12

Written Ministerial Statements

Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the
Economic Downturn, WMS6

McHugh, Mr Gerry

Committee Business

Special European Union Programmes Body, 7

Oral Answers

Planning Service: Staffing, 236

Points of Order, 194

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 328, 329
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 21, 22
Economic Regeneration, 281, 282
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 134–5

Written Answers

Animal Experiment Projects, WA89
Animal Experiments (numbers of), WA93–4
Animal Research Facility Inspectors, WA91–2
Animal Testing Procedures, WA90
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986,
WA88–9
Animals Used for Toxicity Testing, WA89–90,
WA92
Mice Used in Toxicology Tests, WA92
Non-human Primate, WA91
Procedures on Living Animals (new projects),
WA89
Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living
Animals Northern Ireland 2008, WA87–8,
WA92–3

McIlveen, Miss Michelle

Oral Answers

Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation,
288–9

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities, 223–4
Convergence Delivery Plan, 333–5
I CAN Centre, 249, 250

Written Answers

British–Irish Council, WA195
Convergence Delivery Plan, WA316
NEETs, WA170
Springhill Primary School, Belfast, WA43–4

**McIlveen, Miss Michelle (as Deputy Chairperson of
the Committee for Regional Development)**

Committee Stages

Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA 6/09),
CS1, CS2

McKay, Mr Daithí

- Executive Committee Business
 - High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 172–3
- Oral Answers
 - Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737, 33–4
 - Community Relations: East Londonderry, 32
 - Planning Service: Staffing, 232
- Private Members' Business
 - Development of a Jobs Strategy, 20–21
- Written Answers
 - A8 Dual Carriageway, WA344
 - Braidside Integrated School, 315–16
 - Detention Conditions in Prison, WA275
 - Irish Language (promotion of), WA281
 - Parliament Buildings: Accessibility, WA304–5
 - Planning Applications, WA261
 - Planning Service Staff, WA261
 - Policing of Parades in 2010, WA112
 - PSNI's Stop and Search Powers, WA186–7
 - Restorative Justice, WA275–6

McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel

- Committee Business
 - Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 204, 205, 210
 - Special European Union Programmes Body, 8
- Executive Committee Business
 - Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/09): Second Stage, 268
- Oral Answers
 - Civil Service: Back Pay, 290
 - Maghaberry Prison, 35–6
- Private Members' Business
 - Credit Unions, 181
 - Development of a Jobs Strategy, 14–15
 - Economic Regeneration, 283–4, 284–5
 - Quangos and Arm's–Length Bodies of Government Departments, 105, 106
- Written Answers
 - Mother and Baby Clinic in Crumlin, WA327

McNarry, Mr David

- Committee Business
 - Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 208–9
- Oral Answers
 - North/South Parliamentary Forum, 239
 - Parades Working Group, 193
 - Planning Service: Staffing, 236
 - Security, 34

Private Members' Business

- Community Access to School Facilities, 219–20
- Robberies, 305–6

Written Answers

- 2012 Olympics, WA164
- DE: Capital Budget 2010–11, WA166
- Electricity Costs, WA267–8
- Executive's Senior Legal Officer, WA7
- Parades Working Group, WA193

McNarry, Mr David (as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel)**Executive Committee Business**

- Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/09): Second Stage, 266–7, 270

McQuillan, Mr Adrian**Committee Business**

- Special European Union Programmes Body, 4–5

Oral Answers

- Civil Service: Back Pay, 290
- Community Relations: East Londonderry, 31–2
- Magilligan Prison, 39

Written Answers

- 72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine, WA131
- Causeway Hospital: Renal Unit, WA330–31
- Housing Executive Discretionary Grants, WA295
- Points System for the Allocation of Housing, WA294–5
- Review of McClurg v the Chief Constable, WA282–3
- Review of the Civil Service E02 Grade, WA267
- Right to Buy Scheme, WA133

Maginness, Mr Alban**Oral Answers**

- Presbyterian Mutual Society, 31
- Programme–led Apprenticeships, 154
- Schools: Newbuild Projects, 146

Private Members' Business

- Credit Unions, 182, 183
- Robberies, 310, 311

Urgent Oral Answers

- Whiteabbey and Mid–Ulster Hospitals, 299, 300

Written Answers

- Livestock Marts: Help Desks, WA24–5
- Permanent Secretary, WA115
- Reorganisation, WA194

Maginness, Mr Alban (as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment)

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 202–3

Debt Relief Bill (NIA 9/09): Extension of Committee Stage, 2

Special European Union Programmes Body, 10–11

Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill (NIA 12/09): Extension of Committee Stage, 201

Private Members' Business

Economic Regeneration, 281

Maskey, Mr Alex

Oral Answers

Newbuild Projects, 149

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan, 349

Robberies, 308, 309

Written Answers

Pollution from the George Best Belfast City Airport, WA182

Social Housing Waiting List in South Belfast, WA129–30

Maskey, Mr Paul

Oral Answers

GCSE Results, 151

Multiple Sclerosis, 291–2

Presbyterian Mutual Society, 30

Programme–led Apprenticeships, 153–4

Universities: Innovation, 198

Written Answers

Belfast Rapid Transit System, WA347

Community Regeneration: Funding, WA135

Molloy, Mr Francie

Executive Committee Business

Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 96

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 329, 330, 331

Quangos and Arm's–Length Bodies of Government Departments, 100–101, 102, 103

Urgent Oral Answers

Whiteabbey and Mid–Ulster Hospitals, 301

Written Answers

Procurement, WA346

Molloy, Mr Francie (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment

Castle Tower School, Ballymena, 358

Lagan Valley Hospital: Maternity Services, 110, 117

Committee Business

Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09): Extension of Committee Stage, 178

Executive Committee Business

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage, 177

Oral Answers

Assembly Commission, 239, 241

Environment, 232, 235

Finance and Personnel, 286

Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 294, 295

Regional Development, 355, 357

Points of Order, 43, 357

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities, 226, 230, 231

Convergence Delivery Plan, 340, 341, 345, 347, 348, 349

Credit Unions, 179, 183

Development of a Jobs Strategy, 22, 25, 27

Economic Regeneration, 285

Funding for Army Cadets, 43, 45, 46, 48

I CAN Centre, 241

Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 131, 133, 139

Morrow, The Lord

Oral Answers

Security, 34–5

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 322, 323

Funding for Army Cadets, 46, 47, 48

Robberies, 307, 308

Written Answers

A5 Western Transport Corridor, WA289–90, WA345

Alleged Victims of Sexual Assault, WA335

Annual Crime Figures, WA334

Annual Tree and Hedge Cutting Notice, WA128–9

Antisocial Behaviour Orders, WA287, WA336

Apprenticeships, WA171–2

Assaults on Police Officers, WA288

Assaults on Prison Staff, WA187

Basic Salary for Doctors, WA99

Causeway Computer System, WA278

Charities, WA272

Convicted Sex Offenders, WA332–3

Courts Service Translators, WA283–5

Domestic Abuse, WA333–4
Drugs Culture Inside Prisons, WA285–6
Electronic Monitoring, WA111–12
Foreign Nationals Serving Prison Sentences, WA187
Licensed Premises, WA301–2
Low-copy DNA Testing, WA286
Minors Charged with Criminal Offences, WA105
Newbuild Social Housing Units, WA130
Newtownhamilton Police Station, WA282
Privately-Owned Vehicles Used for Roads Service Work, WA129
PSNI Stations, WA282
Sex Offenders Register, WA279
Tasers, WA288–9
Tree Cuttings, WA128

Moutray, Mr Stephen

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 210–11

Murphy, Mr Conor (Minister for Regional Development)

Adjournment

B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road, 261–2

Oral Answers

Airspace Closure, 354–5

Belfast Marathon, 357

Cross-border Public Transport, 350–52

Roads: North Down, 352–3

Translink: Auditory Information, 350

Transport: Security Alerts, 353–4

Water Charges: Utility Regulator, 355–6

Private Members' Business

Over 60s Travel Pass, 124, 125, 126

Revised Written Answers

NI Water Board Members, RWA2–3

Written Answers

A2 Dualling from Maydown to Londonderry Airport, WA338

A5: Environmental Issues, WA347

A5 Western Transport Corridor, WA289–90, WA345

A8 Dual Carriageway, WA344

A26 Dual Carriageway, WA345–6

Annaghmore Road and Bellshill Road Junction at Castledawson, WA290

Annual Tree and Hedge Cutting Notice, WA128–9

Ballynahinch Bypass, WA293

Belfast Rapid Transit System, WA347

Bypass Road for Dungannon, WA115

CAF Trains, WA128

Closure of Northern Ireland Airspace, WA292
Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Service, WA337–8

Damage to Vehicles as a Result of Potholes, WA343

Door-to-Door Service, WA340

Free Travel on Public Transport, WA129

Investment in Infrastructure, WA127–8

Lampposts and Kerbstones, WA126–7

Larne to Belfast Railway Service, WA340–41

Mains Water Pipe on the Tamlough Road between Randalstown and Portglenone, WA291

Mains Water Supply, WA127

Maintenance and Improvement of the Minor Roads Network, WA342

Metro and Ulster Bus Fleet, WA343

Ministry of Defence Housing Sites, WA290

New Dual Carriageway which Bypasses Newry, WA116

New Trains Purchased Under Objective 3 of Public Service Agreement 13, WA344

NI Water

Callouts, WA125–6

capital investment requirement, WA188

capital projects, WA188–90

Consultancy, WA116–22

Contracts, WA122–3

Non-executive Directors of NI Water, WA126

Payments for NI Water Services, WA190

Pedestrian Crossing at the Point Crossroads, Laurencetown, WA338–9

Pothole Repair Work in North Antrim, WA336–7

Potholes on Abbot Drive, Newtownards, WA129

Privately-owned Vehicles Used for Roads Service Work, WA129

Procurement, WA346

Public Hire Taxis, WA339–40

Residents' Parking Scheme in the Lower Malone and Lower Lisburn Road Areas, WA340

Road Infrastructure in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, WA126

Road Maintenance (allocations), WA344

Road Maintenance Schemes, WA191

Road Repairs, WA342–3

Road Surfaces, WA345

Road Works, WA123

Roads at Bushforde and Bush Manor, Antrim, WA191

Roads Service Repair Schemes, WA338

Saintfield Road, WA292–3

Traffic Calming Schemes in North Belfast, WA123–5

Traffic Wardens, WA336

Traffic Warning Lights for Greyabbey Primary School, WA291
Translink Train Set, WA190–91
Tree Cuttings, WA128
Vandalism of Bus Shelters, WA290
Wastewater Treatment Works, WA291

Neeson, Mr Sean

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 206
Special European Union Programmes Body, 6

Oral Answers

First Trust Bank, 195
Schools: Newbuild Projects, 146

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 321
Development of a Jobs Strategy, 16

Urgent Oral Answers

Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 300

Written Answers

Maternity Services Provided by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, WA328

Neeson, Mr Sean (as Representative of the Assembly Commission)

Oral Answers

Stormont Estate: Newtownards Road Entrance, 238–9

Written Answers

NAAFI Tea Products, WA136
Parliament Buildings
Accessibility, WA304–5
Car Parking, WA305
Stormont Estate, WA305

Newton, Mr Robin (as Junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister)

Oral Answers

Community Relations: East Londonderry, 31–2

Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS5, CS9, CS10, CS11, CS12, CS13, CS15, CS17, CS18, CS19, CS20, CS21, CS22, CS23, CS24, CS25

Oral Answers

Magilligan Prison, 39
Oil Prices, 198–9
Physical Activity, 140

Written Answers

Child Sexual Abuse, WA13

Childcare Places in Women's Centres, WA1–2
Children and Young People on Bail, WA333
Free School Meals, WA251–2
Funding Cuts, WA275
Funding for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, WA41–2

Projects in North Belfast, WA2–6

PSNI Investigation into the Nelson Street Site, WA304

Traffic Calming Schemes in North Belfast, WA123–5

Urban Renewal Area Status, WA131

Youth Conferencing with the Youth Justice Agency, WA288

O'Dowd, Mr John

Oral Answers

Chancellor of the Exchequer, 288
DHSSPS: Joint Feasibility Study, 294
First Trust Bank, 194–5
Security, 35
Strategic Investment Board: Chief Executive, 29

Private Members' Business

Convergence Delivery Plan, 340, 341
I CAN Centre, 248, 249, 250

Written Answers

Every School a Good School – The School Improvement Policy, WA244–5
Pedestrian Crossing at the Point Crossroads, Laurencetown, WA338–9
Physiotherapy for Patients with Multiple Sclerosis, WA99
Schools: Academic Selection, WA167–8

O'Loan, Mr Declan

Adjournment

Castle Tower School, Ballymena, 362–3

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 209, 210, 214

Executive Committee Business

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/09): Second Stage, 268–9

Oral Answers

Assembly Staff: Pay and Grading, 239–40
Civil Service: Back Pay, 290–91

Private Members' Business

Car Insurance Premiums, 326, 327

Written Answers

Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena, WA241
Delays for Hospital Treatment, WA175
Front-line Services, WA326
Increased Mileage Claims, WA326

Planning Application E/2008/0346/F, WA82
Review of Public Administration, WA326
Staff Posts at County Hall, Ballymena, WA273–4,
WA327

O'Neill, Mrs Michelle

Private Members' Business
Community Access to School Facilities, 220–21
Convergence Delivery Plan, 335, 336
Written Answers
Fuel Poverty, WA257

O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety)

Urgent Oral Answers
Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals, 298–9

Paisley, Rev Dr Ian

Oral Answers
Spending Cuts, 28

Paisley Jnr, Mr Ian (as Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development)

Committee Business
Eggs and Chicks Regulations (Northern Ireland)
2010: Prayer of Annulment, 179
Executive Committee Business
Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 65–8, 78–9,
95–6

Poots, Mr Edwin (Minister of the Environment)

Executive Committee Business
High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09)
First Stage, 1
Second Stage, 165–6, 176, 177
Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):
Second Stage, 49–51, 58–9, 60
Oral Answers
DOE: Legislative Programme, 235
Planning Applications, 233
Planning Service: Staffing, 232–3, 235–7
Review of Public Administration/Local
Government, 233–5
Road Safety: Drivers over 70, 237
Road Safety Strategy, 237–8
Private Members' Business
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 135–7
Revised Written Answers
Divisional Planning Offices, RWA1
Planning Applications, RWA1
Volume of Landfill, RWA3–5

Written Answers

Air Quality, WA266
Areas of Special Scientific Interest, WA267
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Team, WA264
Belfast Strategic Planning Section, WA264–5
CCTV Systems in Local Councils, WA174
Closet River, Kinnego, WA173
Driving Instructors, WA173–4
Driving Licences, WA82–3
Electronic Planning Information for Citizens,
WA322
General Grant given to Local Councils, WA77–9
George Best Belfast City Airport, WA83, WA266
Green Wedge Between Dundonald and Belfast,
WA321–2
Hanwood Trust Filling Station, WA83–4
High Hedges Legislation, WA260
Illegal Dumping, WA81
Industrial Archaeology and Built Heritage,
WA80–81
Knock Golf Club, Belfast, WA263–4
Local Government Boundaries, WA267
Local Government Chief Executives, WA76–7
Lough Neagh Advisory Committee and the
Lower Bann Advisory Committee, WA265
Northern Ireland Environment Agency, WA77
Pension Rights for Councillors, WA322
Planning Application E/2008/0346/F, WA82
Planning Applications, WA261
Planning Responsibilities for Local Councils,
WA265
Planning Service (finances), WA318–19
Planning Service Posts at County Hall, Omagh,
WA263
Planning Service Staff, WA261, WA262,
WA267, WA319–21
PPS 5 Policy Statement, WA84
Private Research Papers, WA79–80
Proposed Hotel at Magherafelt Road,
Castledawson, WA81–2
Proposed Public Inquiry on Retail
Developments in Newtownards, WA83
Public Accounts Committee's Report on the
Planning Service, WA265
Recommendation from a Boundary
Commission, WA262–3
Road Safety Strategy, WA266
Runway at Belfast City Airport, WA322
Volume of Landfill, WA260
Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, WA322

Purvis, Ms Dawn

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 213

Oral Answers

Children and Young People, 187–8
North/South Parliamentary Forum, 239

Revised Written Answers

Education and Skills Authority, RWA3

Written Answers

Education and Skills Authority, WA43
George Best Belfast City Airport, WA266
Preschool Places (surplus), WA239–40, WA316
Primary Schools Enrolment, WA42–3
Sustainable Development Commissioner, WA310
Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey,
WA313

Ramsey, Mr Pat

Oral Answers

Maghaberry Prison, 36
Translink: Auditory Information, 350
UK Government, 190

Private Members' Business

Development of a Jobs Strategy, 25, 26–7

Revised Written Answers

Divisional Planning Offices, RWA1
Planning Applications, RWA1

Written Answers

Assaults Against Pregnant Women, WA187,
WA283
Domiciliary Care, WA95
Essential Skills Programme, WA65
Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy,
WA95–6
Lecturers, WA66–8
Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries
Compensation Scheme, WA283
PPS 5 Policy Statement, WA84
Regional Colleges of Further and Higher
Education, WA65–6

Ramsey, Ms Sue

Oral Answers

Brand-named Drugs, 293
Children and Young People, 188
Community Facilities, 141
DOJ Priorities, 36–7
Free School Meals, 150–51
Newbuild Projects, 149
Review of Public Administration/Local
Government, 233–4

Private Members' Business

I CAN Centre, 243, 244, 249, 250, 251, 255

Written Answers

Castlecourt Centre, Belfast, WA134

Ritchie, Ms Margaret (Minister for Social Development)

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs
(Amendment) Bill (NIA 19/09): First Stage, 264

Private Members' Business

I CAN Centre, 245–6

Written Answers

72 Drumard Drive, Coleraine, WA131
Benefit Fraud, WA347
Block Grant for Fuel Poverty, WA298
Castlecourt Centre, Belfast, WA134
Co-Ownership Budget, WA298
Community Regeneration: Funding, WA135
Community Workers in North Down, WA302
Customer First Programme, WA304
Dungiven: Regeneration, WA135
Employment and Support Allowance, WA132–3
European Investment Bank Funding, WA135
Executive's Prompt Payment Policy, WA299
Financial Position of Pensioners, WA303
Fold Housing Association Social Housing
Scheme at Skeoge Road, Derry, WA303
Funding for Debt Advice Services, WA131
Homeless People, WA133
Housing Association Guide, WA298, WA299
Housing Associations
Fair Payment Charter, WA301
monitoring contractors, WA301
payments to subcontractors, WA299
Housing Benefit Payments, WA295–7
Housing Executive Design Group, WA300, WA302
Housing Executive Discretionary Grants, WA295
Housing Improvement Schemes: Mid-Ulster,
WA133–4
Housing Waiting List, WA293
Licensed Premises, WA301–2
Magherafelt Social Security Office Staff, WA303
Maintenance of Housing Association and
Housing Executive Properties, WA304
Neighbourhood Wardens, WA295
Newbuild Social Housing Units, WA130
Paying Suppliers, WA299
Pension Advisory Office Staff (expenditure),
WA130–31
Pension Advisory Offices for Ards and North
Down (enquiries handled), WA130

Points System for the Allocation of Housing, WA294–5
 Poor Payment Performance by a Subcontractor, WA301
 PSNI Investigation into the Nelson Street Site, WA304
 Right to Buy Scheme, WA133
 Shared Surface Schemes, WA298
 Sharing and Integration, WA133
 Small Pockets of Deprivation Funding, WA300–301
 Social Fund Funeral Payment, WA131–2, WA302–3
 Social Housing Dwellings, WA294
 Social Housing (funding), WA134
 Social Housing Waiting List in South Belfast, WA129–30
 South Belfast Regeneration Area, WA132
 Urban Renewal Area Status, WA131
 US Visit, WA134–5
 Village Renewal Area of South Belfast, WA293–4
 Warm Homes Plus, WA132
 Welcome Organisation, WA133
 Winter Fuel Payment, WA135

Robinson, Mr George

Oral Answers

Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, 295
 Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme, 139

Private Members' Business

Community Access to School Facilities, 226
 Funding for Army Cadets, 45
 Over 60s Travel Pass, 121–2
 Robberies, 309–10

Written Answers

CAF Trains, WA128
 Closure of Northern Ireland Airspace, WA292
 Ministry of Defence Housing Sites, WA290
 Patient Mortality Rate, WA102
 Social Fund Funeral Payment, WA131–2, WA302–3
 Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, WA322

Robinson, Mr Ken

Oral Answers

Egg Producers, 88
 Maghaberry Prison, 36

Written Answers

Creative Industries, WA162–3
 Injections of the Enzyme Collagenase, WA110–11
 Local Government Boundaries, WA267
 Whitehouse Primary School, WA58–9, WA63–4

Robinson, Mr Peter (First Minister)

Oral Answers

Community Relations: East Londonderry, 31
 Parades, 32–3
 Presbyterian Mutual Society, 30–31
 Spending Cuts, 27–9
 Strategic Investment Board: Chief Executive, 29–30

Written Answers

Assembly Ombudsman, WA308–9
 Attorney General, WA309
 British–Irish Council, WA195
 Child Sexual Abuse, WA13
 Childcare Places in Women's Centres, WA1–2
 Ciubotaru v Moldov Judgement by the European Court of Human Rights, WA309
 Civil Contingencies Policy Branch, WA195
 Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA10–11, WA13, WA308
 Community Relations Budget, WA310
 Community Relations Council, WA6
 Disadvantaged Communities, WA10
 Executive for the North–South Ministerial Council, WA6–7
 Executive's Senior Legal Officer, WA7
 Funding for Childcare Provision, WA307–8
 Honours System, WA11, WA309
 International Ambassadors and Honorary Consuls, WA7–10
 'Invest to Save' Initiative, WA1
 Maze Development Corporation, WA137
 Maze/Long Kesh Delivery Unit, WA137
 Maze/Long Kesh Site (bodies established), WA310
 Maze/Long Kesh Site (expenditure), WA310
 Maze Project (consultation and development bodies), WA137
 NI Direct, WA14
 North/South Ministerial Council (permanent accommodation), WA194
 Parades Working Group, WA193
 Presbyterian Mutual Society, WA12
 Projects in North Belfast, WA2–6
 Quangos, WA7
 Reorganisation, WA194
 Savings Target, WA194
 Senior Civil Service, WA193
 St Andrews Agreement: Working Group, WA193–4
 Sustainable Development Commissioner, WA12–13, WA310
 Undocumented Irish Immigrants in America, WA1
 Victims' Groups: Funding, WA12

Written Ministerial Statements
Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the
Economic Downturn, WMS6

Ross, Mr Alastair

Executive Committee Business
High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage,
171–2
Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):
Second Stage, 55–6
Oral Answers
Multiple Sclerosis, 292
Schools: Newbuild Projects, 145–6
Private Members' Business
Community Access to School Facilities, 224, 225
Convergence Delivery Plan, 342, 346, 347, 348
Quangos and Arm's–Length Bodies of
Government Departments, 102, 103, 105
Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 132–3
Written Answers
Illegal Dumping, WA81
Juvenile Prison Population, WA279
Larne to Belfast Railway Service, WA340–41
Local Government Chief Executives, WA76–7
Maintenance and Improvement of the Minor
Roads Network, WA342
Prison Spaces, WA279
Recorded Incidents of Violence, WA335–6
Sex Offenders, WA113–14
Youth Justice Agency, WA278–9

Ruane, Ms Caitríona

Adjournment
B8 Downpatrick to Newry Road, 260–61

Ruane, Ms Caitríona (as Minister of Education)

Adjournment
Castle Tower School, Ballymena, 363–4
Oral Answers
Artigarvan Primary School, 147
Free School Meals, 150–51
GCSE Results, 151
Ministerial Meetings, 149–50
Newbuild Projects, 148–9
School Inspections, 147–8
Schools: Newbuild Projects, 145–6
Private Members' Business
Community Access to School Facilities, 226–9
Convergence Delivery Plan, 343, 344, 345, 346
I CAN Centre, 252–4
Revised Written Answers
Education and Skills Authority, RWA3
Written Answers

2010–11 Budget, WA237
A–level Students, WA168
After School Homework Club, WA60
Applied Behaviour Analysis in Treating Autism,
WA316–17
Boards of Governors, WA45–50, WA61–3
Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena,
WA241, WA253, WA315–16
Business Studies, Postgraduate Certificate in
Education, WA53–4
C2k Contracts, WA41
Capital Build Programme, WA208
Capital Builds, WA241–4
Capital Works, WA315
Classroom Assistants (income during summer
holidays), WA54–5
Classroom Assistants (policy), WA254
Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy,
WA240
Community Relations Budget, WA250
Convergence Delivery Plan, WA316
DE: Capital Budget 2010–11, WA166
Early Years Strategy, WA166
Education and Library Boards, WA166–7
Education and Skills Authority, WA43, WA56
Emotional Well-being in Schools, WA63,
WA208–9
Every School a Good School – The School
Improvement Policy, WA244–5
Free Nursery Places (North Down), WA60–61
Free School Meals, WA251–2
Funding for School Maintenance, WA314–15
Funding for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum,
WA41–2
Gaelscoil na Speiríní, Draperstown, WA311–12
I CAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch
Primary School, WA57
Integrated Schools Enrolment, WA37–40,
WA44–5, WA50–52, WA238–9
Integrated Schools (funding), WA246–7
Irish–Medium and Integrated Schools, WA245–6
Irish–medium Schools, WA37
Irish–medium Unit at St Joseph's Grammar
School, Donaghmore, WA165
Job Evaluations within the Education and
Library Boards, WA55, WA204
Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory
or Visual Impairments, WA204–5, WA206–7
Killard House Special School, Newtownards,
WA237–8
New School Building for Young People with
Visual Impairments, WA205–6
New School Builds, WA207–8

Newbuild for Ebrington Primary School,
 Londonderry, WA56–7
 Newbuild Schools in Upper Bann, WA317
 Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic
 Education, WA244
 Nursery Class at Annaclone Primary School,
 WA249
 Nursery School Places, WA252
 Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School,
 WA249–50
 Post–Primary Education Planning in the Lurgan
 and Portadown Areas, WA42
 Pre–School Nursery Provision, WA313–14
 Pre–School Places (surplus), WA239–40, WA316
 Preparatory Schools, WA59–60
 Primary School Funding, WA55–6
 Primary Schools Enrolment, WA42–3
 Pupil Absenteeism, WA58
 Pupil: Teacher Ratio, WA209–36, WA245–6
 Retention of Grammar Schools, WA56
 Retired Teachers, WA252
 School Building Projects, WA41, WA247–9
 Schools: Academic Selection, WA167–8
 Schools: Holywood, WA168–9
 Schools in the Intervention Process, WA202–3
 Springhill Primary School, Belfast, WA43–4
 St Patrick's College, Banbridge, WA236–7
 St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge, WA165
 St Paul's College, Kilrea, WA59
 State Funded Nursery Places (North Down), WA63
 State Funded Nursery Places (Shantallow),
 WA253
 Surplus Places in Pre–School, WA239–40, WA316
 Teacher Sickness Rates, WA58
 Teachers' Pensions, WA316
 Value Added Score at GCSE A–Level, WA254
 Vandalism of Schools, WA53
 Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey,
 WA58–9, WA63–4, WA313
 Youth Service Provision, WA53
 Written Ministerial Statements
 Sparklebox Teacher Resource Website, WMS1–5

Savage, Mr George

Executive Committee Business
 Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 71–2
 Oral Answers
 Brucellosis, 87
 NEETs, 154–5
 Review of Public Administration/Local
 Government, 233–4
 Translink: Auditory Information, 350

Revised Written Answers
 NI Water Board Members, RWA2–3
 Written Answers
 2010–11 Budget (Education), WA237
 Belfast Education and Library Board's Library
 Service, WA161–2
 Budget 2010–11 (HSSPS), WA330
 Closet River, Kinnego, WA16–17, WA173
 Executive for the North–South Ministerial
 Council, WA6–7
 Government Property, WA324
 High Hedges Legislation, WA260
 Legacy of the Titanic, WA69–75
 Libraries NI (annual net cost), WA202
 Libraries NI (libraries previously controlled by
 BELB), WA25–35, WA36, WA153–60, WA160–61
 Maintenance of Libraries, WA200–201
 Minutes of High Court Meetings, WA289
 NI Water
 Callouts, WA125–6
 Consultancy, WA116–22
 Contracts, WA122–3
 Non–executive Directors of NI Water, WA126
 Northern Ireland Tourist Board, WA68–9
 Quangos, WA7
 Tort Law and the Human Rights Act, WA289
 Translink Train Set, WA190–91

Shannon, Mr Jim

Executive Committee Business
 Forestry Bill: Consideration Stage, 81–2
 High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage,
 174–6
 Oral Answers
 Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, 89–90
 Commissioner for Older People, 192–3
 Universities: Innovation, 198
 Points of Order, 43
 Private Members' Business
 Car Insurance Premiums, 324–5
 Credit Unions, 183
 Funding for Army Cadets, 40–41, 42, 46, 47
 I CAN Centre, 241, 242, 243, 249, 250
 Over 60s Travel Pass, 123–4
 Robberies, 311–12
 Written Answers
 Assembly Ombudsman, WA308–9
 Ballynahinch Bypass, WA293
 Belfast Strategic Planning Section, WA264–5
 Benefits for People with Parkinson's Disease,
 WA108
 Cancer and Diabetes Service, WA327

Clearance Rates for Burglary, Rape and Assault, WA334
 Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, WA308
 Dissident Republican Threat, WA282
 Door-to-Door Service, WA340
 Employment Opportunities in the Comber Area, WA318
 Enhancement of Bogs and Peatlands, WA138–9
 Farms with Incinerators, WA199
 Feed-in Tariffs, WA173
 Ferry Operators and Tourism, WA318
 Fishing Organisations, WA22
 George Best Belfast City Airport, WA83
 Glastry Ice Cream, WA311
 Gorse Fires, WA272
 Honours System, WA309
 IVF Treatment, WA271
 Killard House Special School, Newtownards, WA237–8
 Muscular Dystrophy Care Advisor Posts, WA102–3
 Parkinson's Disease (funding), WA108
 Parkinson's Disease (numbers of people), WA108
 Pension Advisory Office Staff (expenditure), WA130–31
 Pension Advisory Offices for Ards and North Down (enquiries handled), WA130
 Pension Rights for Councillors, WA322
 People Sent to the UK Mainland for Operations, WA95
 People with Asthma (24 hour access to primary care), WA182
 Personal Asthma Action Plan, WA182
 Physiotherapy for Curvature of the Spine, WA109
 Physiotherapy Treatment (children), WA177
 Planning Responsibilities for Local Councils, WA265
 Planning Service (finances), WA318–19
 Police Reserves, WA186
 Potholes on Abbot Drive, Newtownards, WA129
 Proposed Public Inquiry on Retail Developments in Newtownards, WA83
 Public Accounts Committee's Report on the Planning Service, WA265
 Quinn Insurance, WA256
 Road Maintenance Schemes, WA191
 Road Repairs, WA342–3
 Seed Mussel Fishery at Copeland Sound, Donaghadee, WA22
 Shared Surface Schemes, WA298

Single Farm Payments
 applications received, WA18–21
 assistance, WA138
 reviewing decisions, WA139–42
 unsuccessful claims, WA196–9
 Small Pockets of Deprivation Funding, WA300–301
 Street Pastors Organisation, WA287–8
 Teachers' Pensions, WA316
 Tony McCoy, WA202
 Traffic Warning Lights for Greyabbey Primary School, WA291
 Unsolved Murders, WA334
 Wastewater Treatment Works, WA291
 Wild Mussel Fishery at Copeland Sound, Donaghadee, WA139
 Wind Turbines, WA256–7

Simpson, Mr David

Committee Business
 Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 206–7
 Written Answers
 Newbuild Schools in Upper Bann, WA317

Speaker (Mr William Hay)

Assembly Business
 Public Petition: Whitehouse Primary School, 263
 Committee Business
 Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group Report, 202, 204, 205, 206, 210, 212, 213, 215
 Special European Union Programmes Body, 3, 7, 10
 Executive Committee Business
 Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/09): First Stage, 1
 Forestry Bill
 Consideration Stage, 61, 72, 73, 74, 75, 83, 92, 93, 94, 99
 Further Consideration Stage, 271
 High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): First Stage, 1
 Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA 19/09): First Stage, 264
 Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09): Second Stage, 55, 60
 Sunbeds Bill (NIA 18/09): First Stage, 201
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 194, 196, 197, 198, 200
 Justice, 34, 35, 39, 40
 OFMDFM, 28, 29, 31, 32, 189, 192
 Points of Order, 39, 194

Private Members' Business

- Car Insurance Premiums, 317, 319, 321, 322, 323, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331
- Caravans Bill (NIA 17/09): First Stage, 11
- Community Access to School Facilities, 218, 221, 222
- Convergence Delivery Plan, 332, 333, 336, 337, 338, 339
- Development of a Jobs Strategy, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19
- Economic Regeneration, 271, 273
- Funding for Army Cadets, 40
- Over 60s Travel Pass, 119
- Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 128

Spratt, Mr Jimmy

Oral Answers

- FM/DFM: US Visit, 191–2

Private Members' Business

- Car Insurance Premiums, 319
- Robberies, 315, 316

Written Answers

- Libraries NI, WA311
- Maintenance of Housing Association and Housing Executive Properties, WA304

Storey, Mr Mervyn

Assembly Business

- Public Petition: Whitehouse Primary School, 263

Adjournment

- Castle Tower School, Ballymena, 358–61

Oral Answers

- Newbuild Projects, 148–9
- Oil Prices, 199

Private Members' Business

- Community Access to School Facilities, 221, 224, 230, 231

Written Answers

- A26 Dual Carriageway, WA345–6
- Braidside Integrated School, Ballymena, WA253
- Civil Contingencies Policy Branch, WA195
- Classroom Assistants, WA254
- Gaelscoil na Speiríní, Draperstown, WA311–12
- Inpatients, WA330
- Pothole Repair Work in North Antrim, WA336–7
- Schools in the Intervention Process, WA202–3
- Victims' Groups: Funding, WA12

Storey, Mr Mervyn (as Chairperson of the Committee for Education)

Private Members' Business

- Convergence Delivery Plan, 332, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 344, 345, 347, 348
- I CAN Centre, 247, 248, 250

Weir, Mr Peter

Committee Business

- Special European Union Programmes Body, 6, 7

Executive Committee Business

- High Hedges Bill (NIA 15/09): Second Stage, 173–4

- Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09): Second Stage, 52–3, 60

Oral Answers

- Brand-named Drugs, 292–3
- Foreign Direct Investment, 196
- Water Charges: Utility Regulator, 355–6

Private Members' Business

- Development of a Jobs Strategy, 18, 19
- Over 60s Travel Pass, 123
- Tidy Northern Ireland Day, 130, 131

Revised Written Answers

- Chief Executive and Chairperson of Non-departmental Public Bodies, RWA2

Written Answers

- After School Homework Club, WA60
- Boards of Governors, WA61–3
- Breaches of the Anti-Smoking Legislation, WA270–71
- Capital Build Programme, WA208
- Capital Works, WA315
- Children's Health Services, WA176
- Community Relations Council, WA6
- Community Workers in North Down, WA302
- Confidential Patient Records, WA108
- Driving Instructors, WA174
- Free Nursery Places (North Down), WA60–61
- Funding for Childcare Provision, WA307–8
- Funding for School Maintenance, WA314–15
- General Grant given to Local Councils, WA77–9
- Health Service Dentist Posts, WA270
- Housing Benefit Payments, WA295–7
- Industrial Archaeology and Built Heritage, WA80–81
- Multiple Sclerosis, WA107–8
- Neighbourhood Wardens, WA295
- New School Builds, WA207–8
- Offensive Weapons, WA334–5
- Preparatory Schools, WA59–60
- Prevention of Communicable Diseases, WA176
- Private Finance, WA323
- Private Research Papers, WA79–80
- Public Health Agency, WA176
- Public Health (funding), WA176
- Pupil Absenteeism, WA58
- Regional Colleges, WA169–70
- Road Works, WA123
- State Funded Nursery Places (North Down), WA63

Teacher Sickness Rates, WA58
Vandalism of Bus Shelters, WA290
Youth Service Provision, WA53

Wells, Mr Jim

Written Answers

Areas of Special Scientific Interest, WA267
Bonuses Paid to Doctors, WA271–2
Desertcreat College in Cookstown, WA106,
WA272
DEXA Scans on Bone Density, WA105
Irish–medium Schools, WA37
Nursing and Residential Care, WA96

Wilson, Mr Brian

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Finance) Bill (NIA 14/09):
Second Stage, 54–5

Written Answers

Capital Builds, WA241–4
Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic
Education, WA244

**Wilson, Mr Sammy (Minister of Finance and
Personnel)**

Committee Business

Corporation Tax: Economic Reform Group
Report, 204, 213, 214, 215
Special European Union Programmes Body, 7,
8, 9, 10

Executive Committee Business

Construction Contracts (Amendment) Bill
(NIA 16/09)
First Stage, 1
Second Stage, 264–6, 270, 271

Oral Answers

Chancellor of the Exchequer, 287–8
Civil Service: Back Pay, 290–91
EU Funding, 291
Migration: Public Services, 286–7
Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation,
288–90

Private Members' Business

Quangos and Arm's–Length Bodies of
Government Departments, 106, 107, 108, 109

Revised Written Answers

Chief Executive and Chairperson of Non–
departmental Public Bodies, RWA2

Written Answers

Arabs Resident in Northern Ireland, WA268
Barnett Formula, WA268

Civil Service

2009 Pay Award, WA325
Absenteeism, WA325

Corporation Tax, WA323

Digital Inclusion, WA324

Domestic Rate Payers, WA85

Electricity Costs, WA267–8

EU Funding, WA269

First Trust Bank, WA323

Government Property, WA324

Non–Domestic Rates, WA85

Northern Ireland Prison Service and Northern
Ireland Court Service, WA84

Planning Service (funding), WA268–9

Private Finance, WA323

Projected Birth Rates, WA86–7

Public Sector Reform, WA325

Purchasing of Freehold Property, WA268

Ratepayers (debit/credit card payments), WA86

Rates: Early Payment, WA324

Review of the Civil Service EO2 Grade, WA267

Small Business Rates Relief Scheme, WA85

Surplus Property Assets, WA85–6

Strangers' Index

Campbell, Ms Elaine (Age NI)

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS3, CS4,
CS5, CS6, CS7

Committee Clerks

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS15, CS20

McCleary, Ms Anne (Department for Social Development)

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS7, CS8,
CS9, CS10, CS11, CS12, CS13, CS14, CS15,
CS16, CS17, CS18, CS19, CS20, CS21,
CS22, CS23, CS24, CS25

McLaughlin, Mr Colm (Department for Social Development)

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS16

Sisk, Ms Margaret (Department for Social Development)

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS7, CS8,
CS9, CS10, CS11, CS12, CS13, CS14, CS16,
CS17, CS18, CS19, CS20, CS21, CS22, CS23,
CS24, CS25, CS26

Veale, Ms Amy (Age NI)

Committee Stages

Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 13/09), CS3, CS6,
CS7

